



"As she sat down on the grass beside her mother's chair, the contrast was most remarkable."

OLD PICTURES
IN
A NEW FRAME.

BY DOUGLAS STRAIGHT,
Author of "Told in the Twilight," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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PREFACE.

THE stories included in this volume were written by me some years ago, for various publications devoted to juveniles, under the name of "Sidney Daryl." Not so very long since, I was asked if I should like to have them collected together, and gathered into a single volume under my own name. What objection could I make? I know their literary value is very small, but I have thought it best to leave them pretty much as they were originally penned, in days of impecuniosity and struggle, when the few guineas they brought me were precious help to a highly absorbent pocket, that had always a hole in it. The proofs come to me for correction to a pleasant spot, whence I look upon sparkling seas and

heather-browned islands, basking in golden sunshine, first seen by me nearly twenty years ago. I read them with some astonishment, as far as their sentimental passages are concerned, for a hard professional life, in a field where reality too often outdoes romance, has knocked most of the softer nature and imagination out of me; and not even the "*genius*" of this heavenly spot could give me back the thoughts and emotions under which these stories were written. Alas! "the days have grown old" since "*Little Johnny*" and I parted company; but I confess it is pleasant to shake hands with him and his companions again, and to commend him and them once more to the merciful indulgence of the juvenile public.

DOUGLAS STRAIGHT.

Guernsey,
August 20th, 1877.

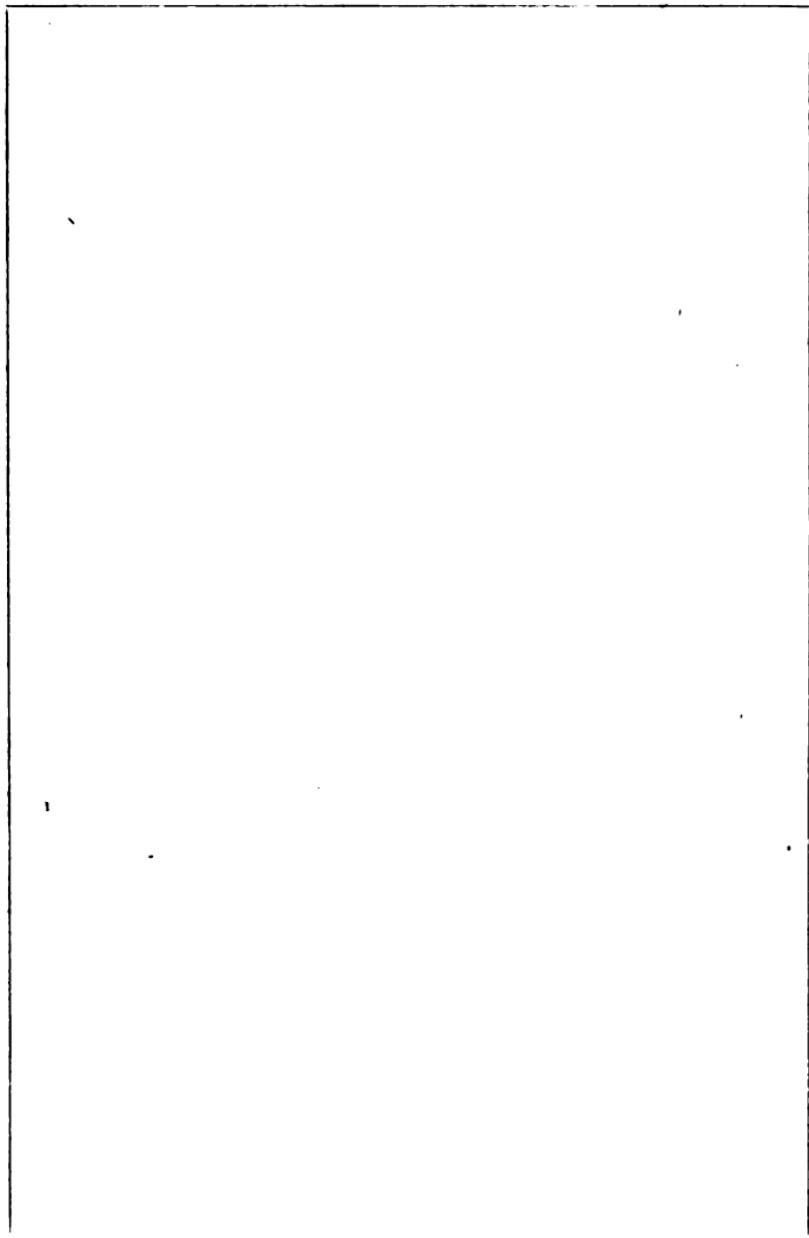




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LITTLE JOHNNY.

"Those only are the brave, who keep their ground,
And keep it to the last."—*Blair*.

BEVERYBODY in Harmouth knew Little Johnny, with his crooked back and tiny crutch, by means of which he managed to get over the ground a good deal faster than most other people who had free and full use of their legs. A great favourite was he with the bluff, weatherbeaten beachmen, who used to take him out with them in their shore-boats to the luggers, when they were bringing their night's catching ashore. Then they would make him sing, for he had a capital voice, and had learned to give out the "Death of Nelson" and "Tom Bowling" with a nautical emphasis and spirit hardly to be expected in a child of twelve. Standing on the shore, you could hear his silvery notes sounding over the water, and presently the shouts and hurrahs of his audience, as he came to a conclusion, showed with what approval his efforts had been received. Johnny had no mother; she had long been dead, having

only lived to bring her child into the world, and then passed quietly away as if in a peaceful sleep. The sole memorial that remained to him of her was a green mound under the great yew-tree in the corner of Harmouth Churchyard, and there every Sunday, after the morning service, he and his father might be found hand-in-hand, silent and sad. For though he had lost his wife close on a dozen years, Joe Barton, rough and iron-hearted as he was, had not forgotten her who for one brief twelve-month made life sunshine to him. "Poor little woman!" he would say, turning away; and as he passed through the gate that led from the resting-place of the dead, a great salt tear as big as a pebble would force its way out, and slowly creep down his brown cheek.

Joe and his little lame son lived in a comfortable cottage just on the outskirts of Harmouth. He was well-to-do, and a successful man; from a poor struggling fisherman, he had gradually become part owner of a lugger, then sole proprietor, and now had no less than three boats of his own. So as time went on and good fortune attended his enterprises, he managed to secure a very nice little nest-egg, which he invested in shares of the County Bank, and then, having laboured long and well, retired from active work to make holiday for the remainder of his days. The County Bank had a local branch at Harmouth, and most of the fishermen and inhabitants deposited their money there, and altogether it was supposed to be a very solvent and flourishing institution.

It was extraordinary what an intense love Joe had for the sea. He was wont to say, "That it did his heart

good to hear the waves, and that they used to talk to him for all the world like human beings." When he gave up fishing, "to rest on his oars," as he would jocosely remark, he had built a small pleasure boat, which, upon its launch, was christened with great ceremony *The Saucy Jack*, and a smart, trim little craft she was, with a power of sailing close to the wind that made her the envy and admiration of all beholders. All through the summer she was kept fully occupied, and heartrending were the appeals Joe had to listen to from the juvenile frequenters of the beach to take them out for a sail with him. For he always had plenty of company, and what with his sea-stories and biscuits and ginger-beer, Joe Barton was at last worshipped as a hero. Johnny always went with him on these marine excursions, and despite his deformity and ever-attendant crutch, without which he could not move, he had learned to handle and manœuvre *The Saucy Jack* with the greatest ease, and was as expert at "taking in a reef" or "putting about" as the oldest salt in Harmouth.

It was a glorious summer's day, the sea so smooth that it rippled on to the beach without noise, and seemed to be coyly kissing the pebbles; so hot, too, that the rowers in the many boats floating about were leaning listlessly on their oars, allowing themselves to drift lazily along with the tide. All Harmouth seemed to be on the water; everything in the shape of a boat was engaged. *The Saucy Jack* alone remained idle. There she lay, about fifty yards from the shore, securely anchored, and everything as neatly fastened up as when she had been left "all snug" the night before. Many and anxious were the in-

quiries for Joe Barton, and general were the expressions of regret that he should not be in the way on such a lovely day. No one knew where he had gone, not even Johnny. All he could say was that his father had received a letter the night before, after reading which he had sat silent and gloomy all the rest of the evening, and gone out before six o'clock in the morning, leaving him a-bed, without saying a word. So *The Saucy Jack* remained idle all through that livelong summer's day.

Evening came on, and Johnny, who had been lounging about uneasily all day, for he could not bear his father to be away from him, began to feel very tired and sleepy, and thinking that a nap on board would be cool and comfortable, hailed one of the passing boats, and was duly transported to *The Saucy Jack*. Creeping into the little cabin at her bow, in which spare sails, empty ginger-beer bottles, and such-like odds and ends were kept, he soon fell into a sound and heavy slumber. How long it lasted he knew not, but when he woke he was startled by hearing a rippling sound in the neighbourhood of his head; it was quite dark, too, and the boat felt as if she were moving smartly along. What could have happened? Had she broke away from her anchor? For a moment he lay still, frightened in spite of himself. Then slowly he raised himself on his elbow, and rubbing his eyes, peered through the narrow aperture that gave admission to the tiny cabin. He could see the mainsail bellied out with the fresh breeze, and that was all. But was it not enough?

He knew he was out on the sea, but how had he come there? Could anybody out of spite have sent him adrift?

No, that was impossible, for he could not recall a soul that had a grudge against him. Suddenly he was startled by a groan as if of a human being in pain. His heart thumped against his side, the perspiration broke out in great beads on his forehead ; he neither moved hand nor foot. Then ensued an agonizing silence, and next a voice, hoarse and broken with emotion, burst into a passionate prayer. Johnny was braver now, and dragging himself along on his hands and knees, as quickly as his infirmities would allow, he made for the entrance, and thrust his head out. There was no moon, but the stars shone out bravely, and in their light he could see the figure of a man with his back towards him, rocking to and fro as if in the throes of despair, his face buried in his hands, and murmuring to himself. Who could it be ? Johnny essayed to speak, but his lips were parched and glued together, and his tongue rough and dry. He stared at the black shadow, as if it were some spirit. Between it and him there was a seat running across the boat ; he tried to reach it, in order to pull himself along the more easily, but could not. Suddenly the figure moved its head.

In a momentary flash of summer lightning Johnny recognized his father's face !

He sought to speak, but could not, while his eyes eagerly devoured his every movement. He saw him drop his hand down to the seat beside him, he saw him raise his arm with something that glittered in the silver light, he heard a click, and then, as if by inspiration, the truth burst upon him. Hurling himself forward with the energy of despair, Johnny caught his father by the arm. There was a flash,

a report, and then he felt something graze his fingers ; but he heeded it not. Seizing a pistol from his father's hand, he threw it with all his strength into the sea, and then sank fainting into the bottom of the boat.

Black grew the clouds, higher rose the wind, beating up the waves into angry contention ; sheets of scud chased one another across the lowering heavens, and warned those whose business lay upon the waste of waters, that a tempest would soon fall upon them. *The Saucy Jack*, left to herself, was heeling over in the trough of the sea, in a perilous fashion ; but still Joe Barton, for it was he, sat with his face in his hands ; still Johnny lay silent and motionless in the bottom of the boat. Presently a great green wave came curling along, and dashing against the boat's side, wetted both to the skin. It roused Joe from his stupor, it roused Johnny from his insensibility ; in another moment they were in one another's arms. Still the wind freshened, still the waves rose higher and higher : those two, clasped in that close embrace, heeded them not, for the mercy of God was in their hearts, and storm and tempest had no terrors for them.

It blew a gale that night and morning, and a large vessel went ashore on Harmouth sands, but by Heaven's goodness no lives were lost. Through the long dreary hours of darkness the wives of the Harmouth fishermen lay sleepless and uneasy in their beds, for their good men were out on the angry sea, earning bread for them and the children. The hoarse voice of the wind and the angry roar of the waves sent a thrill to their hearts as through the weary hours of that terrible night they heard them

shrieking and battling out in the gloom, and many a prayer stole up through the black sky, on its mission of supplication to the ear of the Unseen. When the morning sun broke bravely through the drifting clouds, and the luggers came trooping home, there was a heartfelt shout of thanksgiving to see the toilers of the night arrive safely in harbour. Huge were the breakfasts eaten, sound was the sleep that followed, for it had been a hard fight between man and the elements.

Later in the day a knot of men were lounging on the shore.

"Where's *The Saucy Jack*?" asked one. "Ain't Joe Barton turned up yet?" said another, while old Murtoch, the patriarch of the group, mumbled out, "She ain't drawed up, she ain't at anchor. I'm blessed if I don't think she's gone down head first."

This inaugurated a conversation about Joe, and various and singular were the reasons given for his continued absence. While they were engaged in this discussion, a man, bareheaded and breathless, rushed frantically down over the pebbles, his face pale as death, his eyes almost starting out of his head. When he reached the group, he stopped, and remained speechless. "Hullo, Silas, what's wrong, lad?" inquired one. "You look dazed, man," said another.

"The bank!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Well, what of the bank?" asked old Murtoch, impatiently.

"It's broke," he gasped, and then, without vouchsafing any further information, rushed away as quickly as he

had come. The news he brought fell like a thunderbolt in the midst of those to whom he had told it ; for a moment they seemed stricken dumb and incapable of moving hand or foot, and then hastened up to the town to find if the bearer of these evil tidings had spoken the truth.

Alas ! it was but too true ; the County Bank, being unable to meet a run upon its resources on the previous day at the chief market-town, where its head office was, had been compelled to stop payment, and close all its branch establishments. Considerable assets, however, were expected, the number of shareholders being amply sufficient to cover all liabilities. It was some time before the Harmouth fishermen could be made to understand that, if they were only patient, they would have nearly all their money back. They stood in a body outside the bank door till the darkness sent them home, worn out and sad at heart, to bed.

There went out no boats that night from Harmouth to fish !

The morning following the day on which the bank had stopped, a small craft was seen some distance out, making its way for the shore as well as it could with a broken mast and a ragged sail. All eyes were strained towards it. Whose could it be ? Where was it coming from ? Old Murtoch, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed silently out over the watery space. Then in a moment he dropped his arm, exclaiming, " Well, bless my heart, if it ain't *The Saucy Jack*, with Joe and the kid aboard." Immense was the astonishment ; some said, " it couldn't be ;" but by-and-by, sure enough, the once trim little

craft, none the better for her buffeting in the late storm, glided in past the pier-head, Joe at the tiller and Johnny making himself useful in hauling in the sails. They both looked pale and weary, but the shout of welcome with which they were received roused them, and a gratified smile pleasantly lit up both their faces. When *The Saucy Jack* had been made fast, Joe and his boy came ashore. All were eager to tell him the news, but none liked to, for it was well known that all his savings were invested in the County Bank shares, and, he being a shareholder, every single penny of his must thus be swallowed up. But he seemed to understand their whispering, and, taking Johnny's hand, he merely said quietly, "I know all about it, it's been and ruined me, but that's neither here nor there," and then moved off towards home. But ere he had gone many steps he took Johnny up in his arms, crutch and all, and carried him to the cottage, and up to his bed in his own tiny room. He would not undress him, for already was the poor little man in a heavy slumber, but laying him down tenderly on the outside of the counterpane, that great, strong man fell on his knees, and with his face resting on the hands of his sleeping child, thus remained for a long, long time. What he thought, what he prayed, what thanksgivings burst from his very soul, only the Book wherein his life is written can reveal. It was one of those seasons in the existence of a man when the days that are gone are lived over again, and the lessons they have taught are realised in their true meaning. And when the tempest of bitter reflection is passed, the clouds roll back, the sky breaks into promise of fine weather,

and he nerves himself with fresh courage for the future, bring it sunshine or storm. Thus taking heart, Joe Barton raised himself from his knees, no longer the craven and coward, afraid to meet the ills of life, but ready to grin and bear them. A few short hours had made him an altered man. And who had been the mysterious agent in the hand of Providence that had wrought his reformation? His poor little deformed child, who through the night of storm and danger had been near him with lion heart and dauntless nerve, who had taught him how Heaven extends its mercy even unto him who would take his own life.

A few words more. Years passed on ; the expected call to meet its liabilities had been made by the Bank, and Joe's goods and chattels had all been put up to auction and sold, but he neither grieved nor grumbled ; he set himself manfully to work once again, and though his hair grew grey, and he was not quite so hearty and strong as of yore, yet all were willing to lend him a hand, and he soon began to find his circumstances once more improving. But for one thing he would have been happy and contented : since that dreadful night of storm and disaster, Johnny had never been thoroughly well, his back had grown rounder, and every day he seemed to suffer more and more pain. Joe grew very anxious : every spare moment was dedicated to his child. One day he took him to London to see a great doctor, and when he came back he looked ten years older, for there was a gloomy prophecy gnawing at his heart. From that day Johnny was never allowed to leave his bed. He was a good, patient little

fellow, but he would have no nurse but his dear old daddy; and his thin pale face used to light up the moment Joe entered the room; and as his father sat down by him he would put his hand into his horny palms, and smile as if he were supremely happy. One morning, on his return from fishing, Joe came in to breakfast, and as usual bounded upstairs to see his boy. Johnny was lying on his back, his eyes turned expectantly towards the door. The window was wide open, and a delicious soft breeze from the sea came playing in through it, and toyed with his hair. The sick child was going to his rest, there could be little doubt about that; his eyes were unnaturally bright, his cheek strangely flushed; in a few moments the ebb of the tide must set in. Joe sat down beside him, and then, as was his wont, Johnny put his hand in his, and said in a soft and feeble voice—

“ Dear daddy, I’m going home. The doctor was right when he told you I weren’t good for long. I feel as if I hadn’t got no blood in my body, and my back feels so strange. Hold me up in your arms, daddy; I want to whisper to you.”

Joe felt inclined to resist for a moment, for he was alarmed, and would have gone for the doctor, but the child’s manner kept him by his side. Putting his arm round Johnny, he brought the weary head close to his shoulder. The dying child nestled eagerly to him, and pressing his lips against the big bushy whiskers, continued—

“ Daddy, don’t lose heart again. Promise me that, won’t you? Remember, daddy darling, the secret. I—I’ve kept it; you keep it too, won’t you?”

Pressing his hands to his father's face, he looked eagerly into his eyes, passed his fingers over the rough, sunburnt cheek, and murmuring, "The secret! remember!" in a moment was dead.

They laid him in the corner of the churchyard, under the yew-tree, by his mother, and on Sunday mornings, after service, Joe has now to stand alone and gaze on the spot where rest the two beings he loved so well. But his secret is buried there too. What secret? That having received a letter to acquaint him of impending ruin, and found its information correct, he had sought to escape meeting his disaster by himself destroying the life that a merciful Creator had given him. How he was saved from this crime has been told, and the secret that was is a secret no longer.





NELLIE'S FAULT.

"We sacrifice to dress till household joys
And comforts cease. Dress drains our cellar dry,
And keeps our larder lean; puts out our fires,
And introduces hunger, frost, and woe,
Where peace and hospitality might reign."—*Cowper*.



TONILEDGE LIGHTHOUSE stood on a high promontory, familiarly known to the sailors who passed up and down the Channel as the Eagle's Beak. The great elevation at which it was situated enabled its powerful lights to be seen at an immense distance, even on the darkest and stormiest nights. And wide was the berth given them; for, stretching away from the base of the cliffs beneath the lighthouse, some half a mile out to sea, was a long ledge of sunken rocks, concerning whose murderous exploits with unwary ships many a sad tale could be told. The extreme member of the reef was called the Witch's Comb—a name originating in its shape at the top—which once or twice during the year was just left visible above the surface of the waters

by the vagaries of the tide. Stern and relentless its rocky teeth looked, with the morning sun shining over the sparkling sea only to find its rays fall dull and unreflected on the green and slimy sides, that went down sheer into dark depths, wherein the goodliest vessel that ever floated would have found a grave spacious enough to hold it three times over. Up to the feet of the cliffs the water was fathoms deep; in fact, Stoniledge reef rose from the bottom of the sea like a submarine chain of mountain peaks. Gazing down from the grassy downs above on to the placid waters beneath, their face as smooth as a looking-glass, it was difficult to imagine that but a few inches below the smiling surface an unseen enemy only waited his opportunity to deal death and destruction to gallant ships and their living freights. But he had had enough of spoil in his time; and after one winter, during which he had been more than usually busy and successful, the lighthouse was established, a proceeding which was hailed with universal joy among seafaring people, to whom, though a somewhat tardy boon, it was none the less grateful.

Attached to the lighthouse was a cottage, in which lived Martin More, the keeper, and Joe Torrit, his under hand, with whom he shared the labours of cleaning, lighting, and watching the three great lamps that shone out so brightly at night from Stoniledge cliffs. A responsible and anxious duty it was, and one for which men of the highest character in every respect were only chosen. Martin was an old man-of-war's man, and as fine a specimen of the British tar as you could wish to see. Just

turned fifty, his eye was as clear and his carriage as erect as if he were only twenty. In fact, the authorities chose him almost at once from amongst a host of competitors, so much were they prejudiced in his favour by his personal appearance. A right good fellow he was, looking upon life in its cheeriest aspect, and giving himself anxiety about only one person, his little daughter Nellie. How shall I describe the child, with her lovely face, her winning ways, her weakness of character? She was a very Marie Stuart in short frocks and pinafores, whom everybody loved even when she was naughty. I am but a poor hand at drawing a portrait, and will content myself with saying, that she was the most extraordinary combination of goodness and naughtiness I ever met with in the journey of life. Sometimes she would seem devoted to her father, anxious to anticipate his every wish, ready to run here, there, anywhere in obedience to his command; at others she would stay by herself in the little kitchen of the cottage, where, ever since her mother's death, she had presided over the pots and pans and culinary operations, and look quite angry if anybody disturbed her. In fact, it was not at all surprising that the one or two friends who came over from Sandbeach occasionally to see Martin, declared that Nellie was an incomprehensible little mystery; and even Martin himself would shake his head, and declare "the child's ways beat me altogether." He was a fond and foolish father, far too much so, and the consequence was, that the young lady grew to regard herself as a very perfect piece of juvenile anatomy.

Only a few words of Joe Torrit, who completed the

family party at the lighthouse cottage. He was the only son of a widowed mother, who lived at Sandbeam, a fishing village some four miles off, a sober, industrious fellow, to whom Martin was much attached, and in whom he placed the greatest confidence. Between them, as I said before, was divided the responsibility of looking after the Stoniledge lights, which not only required cleaning, trimming, and oiling during the day, but had to be watched all the night through, lest any accident should happen to them. Summer or winter, human eyes kept watch and ward beneath the blaze of light that flashed from the Eagle's Beak.

Nellie's gravest fault was her vanity. Though she was but thirteen, she gave herself as much anxiety about her bonnets and dresses as the most fastidious lady of fashion. When I say bonnets, I mean bonnets. Hats she had long discarded as a great deal too juvenile, and in their stead she used to contrive the nattiest little bonnets imaginable, to the intense delight of Martin, who always treated her as a woman, and called her his "missus." And yet, despite all her labours, she had only one opportunity in the week of exhibiting her handicraft to public gaze, and that was on Sundays, when the venerable old grey pony was enticed by the most fraudulent means from his peaceful grazing on the grassy cliffs, with much expenditure of persuasive words by Martin, and knowing dodges by Joe, to undergo the labour of carrying the young lady and her papa in a rickety old gig over to Sandbeam to church. Peeping Tom had an immense objection to even this one day's duty out of the seven,

and would frequently exhibit a very strong inclination to make off, gig and all, to his favourite haunts and pastures green ; but ultimately, though compelled into subjection, he would have his revenge by blundering along over the road at a pace that a respectable donkey would have been ashamed of ; and on more than one occasion he had exhibited his appreciation of the sanctity of the day by performing devotional exercises on the most flinty portions of the highway, to the sad disfigurement of his knees. However, every Sunday, as regular as clockwork, Martin and Nellie might be seen in the pew just under the pulpit in Sandbeach parish church, he in his best uniform, she spick and span as a new pin.

Oh, Nellie, Nellie ! if you had thought more of what you had come into the house of God really for, and less of the bonnets and dresses and ribbons about you, the father who so doted on you would never have come to the trouble he did.

At the particular time of which I am writing, Martin had held the post of keeper at Stoniledge for nearly six years, and no complaint of any kind or description had ever been made against him. On the contrary, every quarter, when his salary was remitted him, a letter would accompany the cheque, expressing the highest approval and satisfaction of the authorities. A glad smile would light up his face when he received these flattering communications, and taking Nellie on his knee—a proceeding she sometimes objected to, on the ground that it was not sufficiently dignified—he would smooth her hair with his hand, and whisper proudly to her,—

"They don't think so badly of the old father, missus, them great lords and gentlemen up in London. It's what comes of a man doing his dooty. I've tried to do mine, and so I means to continue till my time comes."

The end of November had arrived. The month had been singularly mild and fine, and the nights clear and starlight, and Martin and Joe both declared that they had never seen such weather for the time of the year in their lives before.

"But we shall catch it by-and-by, my lad," the latter would say, as he and his companion might be rubbing up the reflectors; "we shall catch it by-and-by, and with interest, too; you mark my words."

The 1st of December seemed like a miraculous confirmation of Martin's prophecy. The morning broke with a thick fog and a wretched drizzling rain, which gradually seemed to wash away the mist, leaving a wide expanse of ocean to the eye. The scene was a very desolation of desolations: except, far away on the horizon, there was not a single vessel in sight—a wilderness of waters met the gaze. The day sped on, the lamps were duly prepared and fixed ready for lighting, and Joe, Martin, and Nellie sat down to dinner; after which the former would retire to have a sleep preparatory to his turn coming to watch during the first part of the night. Just as the meal was being finished a messenger came over from Sandbeach, in the person of the baker, to inform Joe that his mother had been suddenly taken ill, and, he feared, was dying. She had earnestly requested to see him. Martin at once accorded his permission for him to go, at

the same time adding that as everything was ready, he need not trouble himself to come back that night.

"The poor soul will be glad to have you, my lad," he said, patting Joe on his back; "and a matter of three or four hours' more watching won't hurt me."

So Joe, with his heart full in more senses than one, departed in the baker's cart, and Martin and Nellie remained to look after Stoniledge lights.

It got dark very early, for the clouds were black and threatening, and the wind was moaning in an ominous manner.

"It will blow a gale afore morning, missus," said Martin, as he opened the door of the cottage to go across to light the lamps. "They're beginning their capers," he continued, looking out to sea, where the waves were already rolling heavily one on the other. The storm spirit was rousing himself at last from his long sleep.

"Now, don't forget what I told you, missus," said Martin, as he turned up the collar of his coat. "Joe's away to-night, and so I don't mean to leave the lighthouse till daybreak, for fear that anything should go wrong. You'd best bring my supper over at half-past seven, as I wish you to go to bed early, for I shall want you up first thing to give me some hot coffee."

Then, as a gust of wind swept in through the door, almost extinguishing the candles on the mantelpiece in the kitchen beyond, he turned to Nellie, and kissing her on the forehead, passed across the little yard, and disappeared through the door of the lighthouse tower.

She was very sorry, now he was gone, that she had not

offered to sit with him ; but then he did not like her to be in the watching-room when the lamps were lighted. besides, it was contrary to regulation, and so she closed the cottage door, and made herself comfortable in the bright, cosy little kitchen, where the fire was burning away gloriously, and everything afforded such an agreeable contrast to the fierce war of the elements that was going on outside. Nellie was very busy ; she had a new cloak in hand, that she wanted very much to finish trimming this Saturday evening, in order to appear with all due magnificence in it at church on the morrow; so down she sat at once, and resting her feet on the fender, stitched away, regardless of the wind and rain outside and the hands of the clock within. All was forgotten but the completion of the cloak, even the preparation of her father's supper.

Thus minutes and then hours sped by. Once she looked up, and then she saw that it wanted only a few minutes to half-past seven ; only a few more stitches that must be finished—ten minutes, more or less, would make no difference—and again she occupied herself plying her needle. Poor vain little girl, could your eyes but have pierced the darkness, and seen something at the foot of the stone steps of the lighthouse tower, you would have thrown down the much-prized cloak with a shriek of horror !

At last her labours were accomplished : again she looked at the clock. The hands pointed to "*half-past eight.*" She started up in a fright, and immediately busied herself in getting together the eatables for her father's

supper. Her conscience smote her as she reflected that she had had plenty of time to get something nice and hot ready for him, and instead of thinking of him, had only been considering herself. What would he say, too, at her being so late, he who was punctuality itself? Throwing on a great oilskin coat, that covered her from head to foot, she caught up the basket in which she had deposited the supper, and opened the door. The rain was still pouring in torrents, and the wind blew it into her face with blinding roughness. What was it that made her start back and tremble all over like one with the ague? Why did she rub her eyes with trembling fingers as she gazed upwards through the driving sleet towards the lamps of Stonileedge Lighthouse? Why such horror, such dismay? They were burning so faintly and dimly that they might as well have been out altogether. At the same moment on her ear fell the deep "boom, boom," sounding like a muffled groan from the direction of the sea. She knew what it meant, this mournful message borne on the wings of the storm. Something must have happened, and she could no longer stand hesitating there. She hurried across the yard to the little door that gave entrance to the lighthouse tower, and as she put her fingers on the latch, "boom, boom," again went the guns, as if upbraiding her for delaying.

Well indeed might she stand for a moment on entering, paralysed with horror!

By the dim light of a small lamp, that spluttered and flickered, and gave ominous signs of going out, she saw her father lying at the bottom of the stairs, with a great

gaping wound in his forehead. It was evident that in hurrying down he had caught his foot, and fallen with such violence on the sharp edge of one of the stone steps, that he now lay stunned and senseless. With a terrified shriek Nellie threw herself down by his side, screaming wildly for assistance; but who was likely to be at hand on these lonely downs on such a cruel night as this? The roar of the blast and the thunder of the billows against the cliff seemed only to mock her loneliness and despair. He was dead, she thought, and then she burst into a wild paroxysm of tears. But Martin had plenty of life still left in him, and presently his lips moved, and he murmured, like one in sleep, something about the lights. Then he made a vigorous effort to rise, but his strength was unequal to the task, and he fell back exhausted.

Nellie thought the night never would end; the minutes seemed like hours, the hours like weeks. She had bound her handkerchief round her father's head, and the bleeding had ceased; but he still remained unconscious like one in a heavy sleep. Thus, through the dreary hours of darkness, alone and with no one to assist her, she knelt beside him, watching, hoping. By-and-by the storm had spent its fury, and through the half-open door she could see the moon riding grandly over mountains of white fleecy scud, and the stars making a hard fight to show themselves. Well was it for the toilers of the sea, whose path on the great waters carried them past the Witch's Comb, that snatches of light broke on them from the heavens; for the lamps of Stonileedge Lighthouse were out, and no warning rays shone down on the angry waves.

beneath from the tower of the Eagle's Beak. As the first grey streaks of dawn faintly appeared on the horizon, Martin, as if arousing himself from a long dream, sat up, and passed his hand over his forehead. Then, as he felt the bandage, the reality of his position was plain to him ; he sprang to his feet and rushed into the yard.

"O God, it is true, they are out !" he cried, gazing upward toward the lantern ; and then, as if the exertion and agony of mind had been too much for him, he fell senseless on the gravel, his grey hair draggled in the dust and played with by the cold morning breeze.

When Joe Torrit came back that Sunday morning, he found Martin crouching in his armchair over the fire, and Nellie bathing his head tenderly, and looking the most perfect little nurse in the world. In a weak and quivering voice he was told what had happened ; namely, that, anxious and frightened by Nellie's non-appearance with his supper at the appointed time the night before, Martin had hurried out of the watching-room to see what had delayed her. He was very loth to leave his lamps for a moment, more especially as they had shown certain symptoms that told him they wanted looking to ; but he would be back in a minute, and could give his whole attention to them. Still he was fit for nothing until he had assured himself that there was nothing wrong with his darling child. In his haste his foot had caught on one of the steps, and he fell, with the result I have already described. As for the lamps, his apprehensions were realised ; for, after spluttering and lingering on with a faint show of existence, they suddenly died out altogether.

"It's all up with me," Martin concluded, with a sigh that seemed to come from his very soul; "after forty years' service, man and boy, I've got on the rocks at last, and it won't be long afore I goes to pieces altogether. They ain't given to passing over neglect of duty up yonder, and I'm right sure to hear of last night's business. I'm a broken old man, and I don't care how soon I'm missing."

But he never blamed or said an unkind word to Nellie. Martin's anticipations were correct, and he was not in the least surprised when, some three days after, he received a letter from the authorities couched in these terms:—

"London, December 5, 18—.

"The Captain of H.M.S. *Seahorse* has reported that during the gale of the 1st inst. he was passing down Channel, and was much surprised at failing to discover any light on the Eagle's Beak. He fired four guns in order to attract the attention of the persons in charge of the lighthouse, but met with no response. Information to the same effect has been received from other quarters, and the authorities have sent down one of their officers to inquire into the matter. It is therefore expected that Martin More, the keeper of the said lighthouse, will be able to give a full and satisfactory explanation. Failing to do so, he will immediately be removed from his post."

The gentleman who had been sent down to make the inquiry duly made his appearance, and turned out to be a lieutenant under whom Martin had served on the North American station. He was a genial, kindly man, and

spoke with much feeling of the old days and the respect he entertained for his old shipmate. Everything was told to him without any concealment of any kind or description, and when he had heard it all to the end, he said, in a cheery voice,—

"Well, Martin, we must see what can be done. The whole of this unfortunate affair seems to have been the result of accident and," he added, turning with a knowing look to Nellie, "this young lady's too great love of finery. I think I may with justice advise that nothing more than a severe reprimand is necessary. And don't you think, Martin, that another hand to assist you is required?"

What Martin's gratitude prompted him to say in answer to this it is unnecessary to relate here. It is enough for my purpose to state that such a report as his old officer had mentioned was ultimately made, and in due course Martin received a reprimand, and another assistant into the bargain; and he still remains the occupier of the cottage on the Eagle's Beak, and the guardian of Stonileedge lights. The only unpleasant reminiscence he carries with him of that night, which was so nearly being his last, is a scar on his forehead that the doctor says he will carry to his grave. But he accepts it, like the stern disciplinarian he is, as a great punishment for his breach of duty in leaving the lights a moment unattended, even though for the purpose of satisfying himself as to the safety of his child.

And she? He who tells another's history finds no part of his task so pleasant as when he has to record how faults and follies have been overcome, and that his hero or

heroine, as the case may be, gaining wisdom by experience, has become wiser and better. Thus improved and altered, we leave Nellie. She had but to look at the scar on her dear old father's forehead, and to feel that but for her vanity and weakness it never would have come there. The lesson she learnt through the long, miserable hours of that bleak December night of storm and tempest could not be set aside. She accepted it in a contrite spirit, and has obeyed its teaching ever since. The harvest was reaped in much bitterness and woe; but its gathering into the barn is with rejoicing and contentment.





JOEY THE TUMBLER.

GARDENER'S COURT, Bermondsey, was not what over-nice people would feel inclined to call a pleasant locality. It certainly had many drawbacks, among which the odour proceeding from certain adjacent soap and tallow manufactories played a conspicuous and by no means agreeable part. Added to this, its inhabitants did not live in that state of harmony which is so desirable, especially in a very narrow circle of acquaintance ; they had an unpleasant habit of settling their domestic as well as their public differences by muscular inducement rather than verbal persuasion, and the centre of the court, just in front of the pump, was the scene of many a fierce and long-sustained encounter. It may, therefore, be easily understood that Gardener's Court was scarcely the spot likely to be chosen as a place of residence by any one in search of peace and quiet ; indeed, mother often said that she would have been right glad to have left it, could she have found any other locality where the rent was equally moderate. But

as it was, at Number Twenty, in the corner of the court, on the second floor, mother, Lizzie, and I lived as long as I can remember; in fact, I may say, on the very best authority, that there I first saw the light, at least, as much of it as was visible through a back bed-room window glazed with brown paper. I have also been informed that I did not make my first appearance in the world at the most favourable opportunity, as, but a short time before my "*début*," my father had most unaccountably disappeared from home, leaving my mother entirely dependent upon the trifling amount of money she was able to earn weekly by dancing before the enlightened and appreciative audiences of the Royal Whitechapel Theatre. As this in all amounted to some eighteen shillings a week, it was not by any means a too liberal income for the support of herself and Lizzie, a child two years old, not forgetting the addition I made to the family expenses. But the Gardener's Court people were kind-hearted folk, with all their rough ways, and Kitty Jarvis, that was mother's name, was a great favourite amongst them, and so somehow or other they managed to lend her a helping hand; and Mr. Rawson, the manager of the theatre, who was very well in his way, increased her salary five shillings a week, and thus she was able to tide over all her difficulties. At the end of the month after my advent into existence she was well and strong again, and back at her duties.

I must pass briefly over the first ten years of my life, merely stating that mother by-and-by got another rise at the theatre, and was elevated to the fairy and princess

line of business. She had induced Mr. Rawson to take on Lizzie, who was grown very pretty; and that young lady soon danced and sang her way into public favour. As to father, we never heard anything of him; mother never mentioned his name, and if I asked her any questions concerning him, she would turn the conversation off to quite another subject. This used to puzzle me greatly, and I wondered what mystery there could be about him that always brought tears into her eyes and made her so sad.

It was at Christmas-time that Lizzie was first taken on at the theatre, and though I was of course very proud to see her looking so beautiful in her silver-spangled dress, with a gold crown on her head, I was very unhappy. Here was mother working and she working and earning money, while I was doing nothing at all but munching the bread of idleness. Certain it was that this could not be right. I tried to think what line of labour was best suited to me. I wandered up and down the streets, vainly hoping to be struck by some brilliant inspiration that should select for me the sort of work to take in hand. I would be a crossing-sweeper, a shoeblack, a vendor of cherries, a seller of penny watches or tooth-combs. But as a crossing-sweeper I should want a broom; as a shoeblack, brushes and blacking; in short, nothing was to be done without capital and stock-in-trade to start me.

One afternoon I was gazing with greedy admiration at the window of a large confectioner's shop, when my attention was attracted by the "tum, tum" of a drum. Turning

round, I was immediately entranced by the vision of a young lady, in a short frock and fleshings, on stilts, dancing to the music of a whistle and the before-mentioned drum, while an elderly man and a young boy went through some marvellous exhibitions on a piece of carpet laid down on the road. Not to waste further time, from that hour I was converted. No crossings to sweep, no boots to black, for me ; I must be a tumbler and nothing else.

For six whole months, without saying a word, I applied myself diligently to perfecting my body in all kinds of muscular contortion ; difficult and painful work was it at first, but perseverance was rewarded, and at the end of the time I was astonished at my own success. But then came a new difficulty. Child as I was, it at first seemed an insuperable one. After all my exertions, to what use could I turn them ? One morning I went with mother and Lizzie to rehearsal to the theatre : it was the day on which the pantomime for the shortly approaching Christmas was to be read to the company, and the parts distributed. I recollect the author well, as he sat in the middle of the stage. He was a pale, sickly young man, with a terrible cast in one of his eyes, and was evidently suffering from an intense feeling of nervousness. However, he managed to stumble through his task, and then Mr. Rawson told each actor and actress what character they were to sustain. Mother was to be *Fairy Fortune*, and Lizzie *Queen Lady-Bird*. Oh, how I envied them, and only wished there was something for me ! When all the parts had been allotted, and Mr. Slowquill (that was the

author's name) was rolling up the manuscript, Mr. Rawson suddenly called out,

"Why, bless my heart! there's no one to do *Quicksilver!*" and sure enough *Quicksilver* had been forgotten. Some discussion ensued, and Mr. Rawson suggested the cutting out of the character altogether—a proposition which Mr. Slowquill did not appear quite to like. At length, with the most unblushing effrontery, I stepped out from behind mother, and offered my services.

"Why, bless my heart!" said Mr. Rawson, looking me up and down through his gold double eyeglass, "the child must be mad. The part will want some one well up in acrobatic business."

"Well, so I am," I stoutly answered; and, determined to strike the iron while it was hot, I proceeded to give a taste of my quality, by turning backwards, head over heels, from one side of the stage to the other, finally squatting down with my head between my legs, looking Mr. Rawson full in the face.

"Bless my heart!" I heard him whisper to Mr. Slowquill, "the young 'un's got it in him; shall I give him a trial?"

"Certainly, of course," said that gentleman, glad not to have to cut out one of his characters.

"He'll have to learn the metallic shiver," continued Rawson, half addressing me.

"So I will, if you will teach me, or show me how," I replied; an answer that clenched the bargain. My name was put down for *Quicksilver*, and mother was to have five shillings a week for my services. She was very pleased

at the welcome addition to her income, more especially as it was quite unexpected ; for I had never practised my tumbling, except when she and Lizzie were away at rehearsal. We spent that evening so happily together, and mother laughed and chatted more than I had ever seen her before.

Boxing Night came. The last touch had been put to the scenery, the last drop of oil to the machinery for working the grand transformation scene, everything was in readiness to reveal the beauties of fairyland to the eye of the Whitechapel playgoers. At length the hour for the performance arrived, and no sooner were the doors open, than every nook and corner of the house was crowded with the usually uproarious Christmas audience, who began to shout and stamp their feet the moment they had taken their places. Then the band began scraping their fiddles, preparatory to commencing the overture. Mother, Lizzie, and I were standing at one of the wings, all ready dressed to go on. They both looked so beautiful, and as I held them by the hand, I felt so proud of them. At that moment the stage-door porter came up and said, "There's some one at the door as wants to see you particular, Missus Jarvis."

"But I can't come, Jones," answered mother. "It won't do for me to go, dressed as I am."

"Well, I thought I'd best come and tell you," growled the surly Cerberus, as he turned surlily on his heel.

Mother looked very thoughtful, but suddenly she moved quickly away, and I saw her catch up an old cloak, and wrap it round her, and go in the direction of the stage



"There's some one at the door as wants to see you particular, Missus Jarvis."

entrance. She was absent about ten minutes, and by that time the overture was over, and the curtain had risen. When she came back, she was as pale as death, so much so that one of the scene-shifters standing by said,

"Lor, missus, how awful white you do look! You'd better have a drop of summat afore you goes on."

This remark appeared to restore her to a sense of her position; she seemed to set her teeth closely together, and then in another minute she was on the stage, and in a few moments I followed her. Despite my nervousness and deep sense of the publicity of my position, my eycs would keep fixed on my mother's face. I watched hers in their turn, and I saw them earnestly directed to a box on the stage, behind the curtain of which a man was seated, watching her intently. I was certain they knew one another. Who could he be? He looked much like a foreigner; his hair was long, and shaded his forehead, and a heavy beard and moustache almost hid the lower part of his face. His dress, too, was somewhat peculiar in appearance, and bore all the marks of colonial tailoring. In fact, he might have been a wealthy New Zealand sheep-farmer, or a gold-digger—for all this happened in the early days of Australia's fame—fresh from the Adelaide fields. When mother went off, I still saw her with her eyes fixed on him; and presently, looking furtively round to see if any one was watching her, she pressed her lips upon her fingers, and her very soul seemed to go with a kiss she breathed towards him. After that I lost sight of her, and it was not till the transformation scene that I saw her again.

Slowly were folded back the clouds of gauze that hid the beauties of "*Queen Laay-Bird's Fairy Home*;" soft was the music played, as one by one the rolls of flimsy stuff disappeared, leaving a brilliant mass of tinfoil gems bare and glittering; and loud and prolonged was the applause of the audience when the glories of the whole scene were revealed. In the centre, supported apparently by a chain of roses, but in reality by a strong iron suspender, mother and Lizzie hung in mid-air, in a kind of floral cradle, beautifully constructed. A strong electric light was thrown upon them, and gave the whole scene a most enchanting appearance. The good fairy, who always comes on at this period to change the Meritorious Young Man into harlequin, and the Naughty Baron into clown, and so on, had already commenced delivering the customary speech, in which "soon" rhymes with "pantaloons," when a sharp crack, like the report of a pistol, was heard, and in a second more the cradle in which mother and Lizzie were seated came down with terrific force on the stage, with what effect I will not attempt to describe. Mr. Rawson at once shouted out, "Drop the curtain;" but ere that could be done, the foreign-looking man was on the stage at mother's side, supporting her head upon his knee, and bending tenderly over her. Then down went the roll of painted canvas, shutting out this thrilling life *tableau* of human suffering.

Lizzie and mother were both carried home to the second floor in Gardener's Court, and laid bleeding and moaning on their beds. The doctor soon came, and was hopeful. Bless him for that, and the earnest, watchful

attention he showed, staying through that bitter winter's night, tending them with all the skill and kindness for which his noble profession is so famous.

Five o'clock in the morning came ; I looked out of the window, and the snow was falling heavily. Mother and Lizzie were sleeping soundly, owing to the influence of a soothing draught that had been given them. The fire was burning briskly, and the doctor, who was sitting in a chair beside the grate, with me on his knee, trying to soothe me to sleep, was gazing thoughtfully into the embers, when a knock came at the door. The doctor rose and opened it, and who should enter but the foreign-looking man I had seen at the theatre ? The doctor's look seemed to say, "Who are you?" and the stranger understood it ; for going to mother's bedside, in a voice broken with suppressed emotion he said,—

"I've a right to be here, sir. I tried to keep away, but it weren't a bit of use. I couldn't abear the thought that my poor gal and her little one were dying, without my so much as saying good bye. I ain't been what I ought—I knows that. I've been a vagabond—a thief," he added with an effort, as if the word stuck in his throat ; "but I ain't forgot my poor lass, I ain't forgot my poor lass ;" and with that, he buried his face in the bedclothes, and sobbed like a child.

The doctor said not a word in answer ; patting me on the head, he rose quietly from his chair, and whispered, "I shall go and smoke a pipe at the door downstairs ;" and he added, "Come for me if I am wanted." I could see the tears in his eyes—great, kind, soft eyes that they were.

And this was my father, and thus it was that he came home!

I shall not dwell on the details of how, when he had mastered his emotion, he rose from his knees, and came to the fire, and told me who he was. Looking me full in the face, with an eagerness that frightened me for a moment, he slowly said,—

“My lad, I know you’re my lad, for you’ve got her eyes;” and then he kissed me so warmly. “Tell her when she wakes that father has been here, to kneel once more by her side, and that, broken down, disgraced convict that he is, he still loves her. Tell her this, my lad, and may the blessing of your lost, hunted down father go with you.”

Then quietly kissing me again, he glided into the next room, where Lizzie was, and then he came back again and pressed his lips to mother’s forehead. At that moment the door was pushed violently open, and a rough-looking man blundered in. Instinctively father put his finger to his mouth in token of silence, but the intruder would not be hushed.

“It’s no use, Jack Jarvis,” he muttered surlily. “I’ve been after you a bit too long to be gammoned by any more of your artful dodges. I’ve been on your track better ‘an twelvemonths, and now I’ve got you I mean to keep you, so just let me slip on the bracelets, and don’t make a noise, or I shall have to call up my mate as is waiting down below.” Without a word, father rose from his knees and put out his hands, and I saw something slipped over them that fastened them together,

while the man continued, ‘That’s right, I’m glad you’ve made up your mind to take things comfortable. They’re in a wonderful hurry to have you back at Freemantle, for there was an awful row when you managed to make off as you did. Come on now, and don’t stand spooneying there.’

Imprinting one last kiss on mother’s forehead, he came up to me, and putting his lips close to my ear, whispered, “God bless you, my lad ; remember my message ;” and in another moment he was gone.

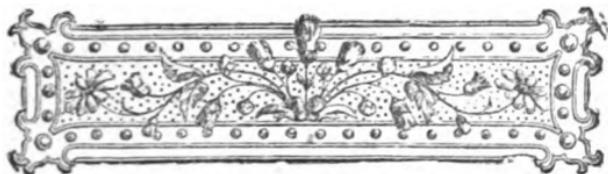
Still mother and Lizzie slept on, knowing nothing of what had passed ; as for me, overcome with fatigue and all that I had passed through, I fell on to the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

By God’s mercy, the two sufferers, after a long and tedious illness, recovered. Mr. Rawson was very kind and good to us, and a subscription was got up that enabled us to meet all our wants. As for myself, I still continued at the theatre, and with such success that I was by-and-by removed to one of the fashionable houses at the West End, and found myself in the receipt of a largely increased weekly salary. Three years after the accident at the Whitechapel Theatre and my strange and short interview with my father, mother was one day looking out of the window, when I saw her turn suddenly pale, just as she did on that terrible night, and put her hand to her head, as if in pain. I was rushing towards her, when the door opened, and in a moment more father held her clasped in his arms.

“I’ve come back, Kitty ; I’ve served my time. I’m a free man now,” he cried.

What more can I tell? I have not found that the sins of the father have been visited on the son; on the contrary, I have prospered exceedingly in my humble way. Every mail from New Zealand brings me a letter from those dear ones over the sea; himself, mother, and Lizzie, who in that new country have shut up the smeared and blotted pages of his past, seeking to redeem them by being useful in their generation. Who should dare to say that no good can be found in him who once, and once only, committed a crime?





WANTED A STITCH.



HE villagers of Long Staunton differed in no respect from other country folk. Though the sum total in population of the pretty hamlet, including babies, amounted in all to little more than one hundred and fifty souls, there was chattering and gossiping enough to have done honour to a metropolitan suburb ; and old Toker, the parish clerk and undertaker, was often heard to declare that "he never clapped eyes on a more scandalous, mischievous lot of women." This was perhaps a trifle too severe ; still, certain it is that the female portion of the inhabitants were always acquainted with one another's most private and domestic affairs ; and if Giles, the horseman up at Caidge Farm, happened to have had a few words with his good woman at breakfast, the fact was speedily known throughout Long Staunton, and duly magnified as it passed from mouth to mouth, till by the time it reached the farther end of the village it was authoritatively stated that " he had given her a black eye." As can be readily understood, the results that occasionally

followed were not calculated to promote harmony in the particular establishment whose inner life had thus been exposed to public gaze. There was, however, one person residing within their circle of observation who baffled all the efforts of the Long Staunton gossips to pry into his proceedings, and that was the gentleman who lived in the small cottage close by the church. Beyond a passing salutation to some of those whose faces had become familiar to him, he had never entered into conversation with anybody since he came, five years before, and took up his abode in the village. All that had to be done out of doors in connection with household matters he left to his little daughter Edith, who was his sole companion and attendant, and with the exception of whom, no one ever entered inside the cottage. All that was known about him was that his name, or at least the one he gave, was Arthur Bellingham, and that he seemed to be poorly off, to judge from the smallness of his dealings with the butcher, who came over twice a week from Harlesdon, and his keeping no servant. Edith Bellingham was one of those children who become prematurely aged through responsibility being thrust upon them. This little girl of fourteen winters—I had almost said summers, but sunshine and fine weather had not fallen to her lot — though so fragile in figure, so childlike in face, had all the thoughts and feelings of a woman, and had often lent strength to her father's heart in its hours of darkness and gloom ; and they were many. Arthur Bellingham's face always wore the shadow of a great sorrow ; there was no light in his eyes, no colour in his

cheeks—he was as one with whom the past is ever present, in shape and form as of a fiend who spies and dogs the footsteps till the victim would fain rush upon his persecutor, and murder him. But memory cannot be silenced save by death !

The cottage wherein Edith and her father lived their lives away was a pretty little place, and owed much of its neat appearance to her. She it was who attended to and nailed up the honeysuckle over the porch, and took care that the curtains at the two bed-room windows were clean and white. I wish some of the little girls I know could stand over the washing - tub, lathering and wringing the linen as she did. And yet, perhaps, it is better not; we grow old soon enough, and hard work and washing-tubs are not delayed. Heaven help us ! even the rattle and the doll are worthy regret, though if they break, it costs but a few pence to restore them. But the days come when the toys and playthings are of greater value, and all the gold in the world cannot replace them.

About nine o'clock, and a summer's evening ! Arthur Bellingham was sitting in his arm-chair by the open window that led into the small garden at the back of the cottage. Edith sat on a footstool at his feet, her hands clasping her knees, and her face turned upwards towards his with an expression upon it full of tender love and devotion. Though the gathering darkness concealed it, though no eye could see it even in the broad daylight, there was an unseen chain that passed from her heart to his. " Honour thy father and thy mother ;" even those venerated words spoke but one-half the sympathy and

affection that Edith concentrated on the gloomy, silent man beside her, who was gazing fixedly on the thunder-cloud gathering in the horizon, with a look that seemed to envy the heavens the coming storm, when they would shake off their blackness to awaken in the morning untroubled and serene. And now the wind, that had seemed to sleep for the last fortnight, began to whisper among the leaves, and a few heavy drops warned those who were out of doors to hasten under shelter. A short interval, then heavy rain and thunder and lightning !

Edith would have closed the window, but her father moved not, save to place his hand gently upon her head, and smooth her hair. He seemed absorbed in watching the conflict of the elements; still were his eyes fixed on the black cloud that from the size of a man's hand had now spread itself over nearly the whole expanse of sky. Presently his lips moved, and stretching out his arms towards the growing darkness, as if to draw some one thence to his embrace, he wailed out passionately,—

“ Darling, come to me! I was not guilty, indeed I was not. How could you think me so when I swore to you I was not? Put your hand on my face, as in the old happy times, and say something loving to me. Oh, come to me, come to me! Do not shrink from me, or I shall die.”

Then, as he uttered these last words, he leaned eagerly forward, as if to snatch hold of something, and then, exhausted by the effort, sank back in his chair with a groan.

In the sudden flash of lightning that had illumined the

room and the garden outside with the brightness of day, Arthur Bellingham fancied he saw Edith's dead mother standing before him, for his brain was weak—sore trials had played havoc with his mind, the weight of their bitterness had crushed him down; and though he was no madman, the past with him was as a horrid dream, whose wakening had left him broken in spirit, hopeless, and, worse than all, purposeless. This was why the Long Staunton gossips thought him so strange and incomprehensible; this was why the child Edith, full of cares and responsibilities, was a woman when others of her age were not yet emancipated from the school-room.

And yet a stitch in time might have saved all this.
But how?

* * * * *

Into that past, whose experience had been so bitter for Arthur Bellingham, we must now look, for therein may be read the story to which what has gone before is but the moral.

A good sixteen years before the night of the storm must be travelled back, a species of journeying that can only be indulged in by the imagination, to the time when Arthur was a bright, happy lad of nineteen, the only son of his father, a large millowner and manufacturer in the well-known town of Widney, in Blankshire. The young gentleman had then only just left Rugby, but Mr. Bellingham, sen., was one of those men who consider that the true secret of success is to start early in business, and, much to his son's disappointment, announced to him his determination not to send him to the University, but at

once to place him in the counting-house under his own eye.

Arthur by no means coincided in the paternal views, and at first made a grand show of resistance; but Mr. Bellingham, though devotedly attached to his boy, was only the more firm and resolute with him, and threatened to cut off his allowance, unless he at once complied with his wishes. So the obviously weaker party of the two was compelled to yield and to surrender the hope of fulfilment of the anticipations he had formed of the jolly times he would have at Oxford in the company of his old schoolfellows. Still, though thus driven to submission, he took care to enjoy himself as much as circumstances would allow him: in and about Widney, and at all the balls and croquet parties within anything like a reasonable distance, old Bellingham's son and heir, as he was called, might always be found. He was gay, accomplished, and amusing, and found favour wherever he went.

Now, though I am going to have a few words to say about love-making, I promise you they shall be very few indeed, for I am sure my young people would only think me a bore, and I would not for worlds run the risk of forfeiting their good opinion, if I have already gained it. Whether or not Arthur was to blame for so doing, he nevertheless did fall in love, and that with some one so ill suited to him in point of position that he ought to have known better. It is quite true that she was lovely in face, and good as she was beautiful; but the distinction between a millowner's son, with the prospect of several thousands a year, and a fac-

tory girl, is considerable, and all the love in the world cannot remedy it. Arthur, though he tried to shut his eyes to the fact, knew perfectly well that the union he contemplated with Ellen Verner was an ill-assorted one, and would irrevocably offend his father. But as a runaway horse blindly rushes to his own destruction, he surrendered himself to the current of his inclination, casting prudence and discretion to the winds, and ran away to London with Ellen, where he was married to her, with the handsome balance of ten pounds remaining in his purse after all expenses had been paid, to live on till Arthur's ship came home.

For a week they were supremely happy.

When Mr. Bellingham was informed, in a very penitent letter left behind by the truant son, of what he intended doing, he made no disturbance, burst into no fit of violent passion, but simply called in his chief clerk, and ordered him to remove the office-coat that Arthur used to wear, which was hanging on the door of his private counting-house, and the same evening called upon his solicitor, and altered his will. The son had not been mistaken when his heart told him that his father would never forgive him. Never! That is, perhaps, too hard a word!

It is necessary that I should say here that the house in which Mr. Bellingham resided in Widney adjoined his offices and counting-house, and that a door led from the one to the other. Often when the good townspeople were fast asleep in their beds, the owner of Lorton Mills would wander into his business room, and opening his iron safe, add up columns and columns of figures, till a

casual observer would think they would have blinded him. But when he had satisfied himself with this strange amusement for his hours of relaxation, he would look up quite fresh and with sparkling eye, for he knew that he was far and away the richest man in those parts. Sometimes, when more money had been received than usual in the course of the day, he would have out his cashbox, and count bills and bank notes and gold and silver over. Mark Bellingham had known once what poverty was, and that knowledge made him a miser. His favourite substitute in the evening for his coat was a faded old dressing-gown, that fastened with a tassel at the waist, which, he said, was more easy and comfortable than anything else. Like himself, it had seen a good many years' service, but he clung to it with the tenacity of old acquaintance, and the housekeeper declared that she believed he would leave directions in his will that he should be buried in it. It had only one pocket, and that was on the left breast side, and was intended for a handkerchief. Mr. Bellingham's fingers were always too busy for him to require side-pockets in which to put idle hands. One morning he rang the bell for the housemaid, and told her to mend the inside of his pocket, for there was a hole in it, and his handkerchief had slipped through into the lining. She said, "Yes, sir," but forgot all about it for a long while. This was somewhere about six months after Arthur's rash marriage, and that indiscreet young gentleman and the partner of his fate began not only to feel the pangs of poverty, but the pangs of hunger. He had managed to pick up a precarious subsistence by writing

for a new evening paper at a ridiculously cheap price, but through the coldness of an unappreciative public, it collapsed, and at the end of the week in which it came to its death Mr. and Mrs. Bellingham, jun., were in the agreeable position of being in London without a penny in their pockets. The young husband was at his wits' end in what direction to turn for support. At last he screwed up his courage, and said to his wife, "I will go to my father, and see him. Perhaps the sight of me may revive his love, and he may help us."

He had to walk all the way from London to Widney. Mr. Bellingham, in his dressing-gown, was in his office, his cashbox at his side, counting, according to his custom, the day's receipts. It was just after the quarter, and a great deal of money had been paid in to him since the morning. The clock in the dining-room (which was audible, for the door of communication between the house and the counting-house was open) was striking eleven, when there came a ring at the front door bell. He had nearly finished his task, and was holding in one hand a letter that he was reading, and in the other a bank note that had evidently come as an enclosure. The summons at this late hour startled him, and putting down the letter, he turned to the front door, and opened it.

The interview between Arthur (for he was the visitor) and his father need not be pondered over. "As you have made your bed, so must you lie on it," was the cold, unchanging answer that met every appeal for assistance and forgiveness, till the poor lad, wearied out and heart-broken at finding a stone where he might have hoped for

bread, sank prostrated and fainting on the floor. For a moment Mr. Bellingham was alarmed, and he hastened for some wine and water. He was much annoyed to find that the chiffonier, in which the former was kept, was locked, and what was worse, the housekeeper had the key. He ran with strange speed up the stairs, and knocked at her door. It took some moments to arouse her, but at last he received the key, and turned to go down, when he heard the front door closed with a slam. "God help the lad! he cannot have gone out of the house," he said to himself; then hot, strong, in full flood, came the tide of repentance over him, but only for a few seconds. Mark Bellingham had far too good a conceit of himself ever to admit that he had been in the wrong, even in his communings with self. A little less gold and a trifle more heart would have made the owner of Lorton Mills a better and, I fancy, a happier man.

His surmise was correct. Arthur had gone; on recovering from his momentary faintness he stumbled to his feet, and staggered to the front door, and then out into the night, glad to escape. He preferred rather to trust himself to the tender mercies of strangers than to the pity of a relentless father.

When Mr. Bellingham had satisfied himself that his son had taken his departure, he gave a sigh of relief, and proceeded to finish the work in which he had been interrupted. He took up the letter he had put down, and read it carefully through, then folded it up, and looked about as if searching for something. The contents of it informed him of an enclosure with it of a bank note for

£100. But where was it? He turned all the papers and notes over in the cashbox, looked under the table and all over the floor—everywhere, in fact, but it could not be found.

Then a thought budded in his mind, and grew and grew, till, in fewer moments than I can write it, Mark Bellingham had arrived at the conclusion that his son was a thief. His visit at so late an hour, his want of money, and then his weakness, his fainting so well simulated, and his abrupt and sudden departure, were undeniable evidence of his guilt. Yes, my children, when you grow older you will learn that even the most innocent acts appear suspicious when regarded with a preconceived determination to believe in guilt.

A good deal of excitement was caused at the Blankshire assizes when Arthur Bellingham was tried for stealing a £100 Bank of England note, and his father appeared in the witness-box as prosecutor, and gave evidence against him. Not a few people said that, considering Mark's wealth, and the ordinary feelings of a parent for a child, he might have hushed the matter up. But the Widney millowner was ambitious of being looked upon as a second Brutus, and what testimony he had to give he gave without faltering or hesitation. Arthur had asseverated his innocence of the charge ever since he had been taken into custody, and vehemently urged it to the jury, asking them how they could believe him guilty when he was arrested only the next day, and no money of any sort or kind was found upon him. But the learned judge, in summing up, pointed out that a thief very often took the

earliest precautions that nothing should be found upon him in case of capture, and often had a kind friend to whom he entrusted, and with whom he shared, the booty. The jury looked wisely at one another, and after five minutes' deliberation, returned a verdict of guilty, and the prisoner was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment, with hard labour.

Mark Bellingham returned home to Widney with the self-consciousness that, however painful it might be to him, he had done his duty. He was singularly polite and kind to his household, and praised the housemaid for having remembered to mend the pocket of his dressing-gown, which laudation was scarcely deserved, for she had forgotten to do it for several days, and had only recollected her master's order that very morning.

Ill news always flies apace, and her husband's trial and conviction soon found its way to Ellen's ears, who, since her return from a visit to Arthur in prison, had been laid up on a bed of sickness at St. Christopher's Hospital, to which she had obtained admission through the earnest endeavours of the parish doctor, who had found her dying in a dirty garret in Drury Lane. This last blow was more than she could bear, and she lived only long enough to bring the child Edith into the world, and then went to rest in the land where all troubles and sorrows are forgotten.

When Arthur had served his period of punishment, and came out of prison, the first thing he sought was his baby, and he found that she had been adopted by the wife of one of the dressers in the hospital, who had no children

of her own, and had become devotedly attached to the poor lonely little thing. So he left her there till such time as he should have a home to take her to, and went out into the world to seek employment. Hard as it had once been to get, how much harder was it now with the brand of crime upon him ! But fortune favoured him at last : he secured the post of messenger to a large warehouse in the city, where, by his industry and honesty, he worked on to gain the confidence and esteem of his masters. But he was always a gloomy, silent man, nor smile nor bright look ever was seen on his face ; he performed his duties conscientiously and to the letter, but all the while more as a machine than a man. When the head of the firm died, he left Arthur an annuity of £100. It was time that something came to him, for his fellow-servants began to wonder at his strange ways, and some openly said that they believed he was a trifle cracked.

With the money he had left him, he sought out his child, and with her came and took up his residence at the little cottage in Long Staunton, where we found him. And Edith was good and tender, and baby though she was, often lent strength to him in his hours of melancholy, for there came power to her from heaven, and with that all things are possible.

* * * * *

The morning following the storm dawned cloudless and serene, and was marked by an extraordinary occurrence. Just as Edith and her father were finishing breakfast, a carriage and pair drove up hurriedly, the horses covered

with foam, and the vehicle itself splashed all over with mud. The servant jumped down from the box, and opened the door, and then assisted an old man to descend from it, who moved with the greatest difficulty. Arthur looked eagerly out of the window, then a strange flush came into his cheek, and he put his hand to his heart, as if he were in pain. Edith was at a loss to understand who this strange visitor could be, but she at once went to the front door, and opened it, and Arthur followed her, and stood upon the step.

Slowly the old man toiled up the little path that led from the gate to the door ; then, as he neared it, he raised his eyes, and beheld father and daughter. With a wild cry he fell down at Arthur's feet, shrieking almost, "Arthur, Arthur, forgive me !"

Thus it was that Mark Bellingham came back to the son he had condemned to ignominy and shame, to the prisoner's dock and the prisoner's cell. Where was all his vaunted self-pride now ? Fled, as he felt the shadow of death falling on him ; fled, as he remembered what the good preacher had said, " Judge not, that ye be not judged ;" fled, loathed, cursed, when in the lining of the old dressing-gown, after fourteen long years, was found the £100 bank note, for stealing which he had consigned his son to a felon's dock, and stood up before all as his accuser. Thus God punished and brought down this man, so mighty in his own estimation, and humbled him even to the feet of the son he had so wronged.

My children, it is even on such a triflē as a stitch in time that a man's fate, honour, everything, may depend.

The servant who forgot to obey her master's order, and to sew up the hole in his dressing-gown pocket, through her idleness and forgetfulness brought shame and misery to an innocent fellow-creature. And yet how slight the part she has played in my story !





BARNEY'S LITTLE WIFE.

"Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there."
—Shakespeare.

SHE certainly was the strangest little creature that ever breathed, with features so perfectly developed that people would never believe she was only twelve years old; such snow-white skin, such large soft eyes, just like a fairy for all the world; and such a queer, old-fashioned mite too; for though to look at the expression of her face, she might have been twenty, you had but to shut your eyes when she was speaking, and you would have thought that a woman of fifty at least was talking. But her precocity made her only the more engaging and fascinating, and the good people of Hartleigh were never tired of declaring little Ethel Somers to be a marvel of humanity, a female prodigy in mortal shape.

Who was this paragon of children? The question comes as a matter of course, and I hasten to answer it. Ethel

Somers was an orphan, living under the roof and care of her aunt, in the big red brick house in Hartleigh High Street. Concerning her parents she had no recollection, for the night she came into the world her mother passed out of it, while her father, who was organist at the parish church, died when she was scarcely a year old, leaving her and the settlement of his debts as a legacy to his unmarried sister, Martha Somers, the dearest, kindest old maid to be found in the United Kingdom. A faithful legatee, indeed, she proved; she paid her improvident brother's bills, and took his lonely child to her heart of hearts, concentrating every hope and affection upon her. Thus it was that Ethel grew to regard her in the light of father and mother both.

Martha Somers was a woman possessing a very large share of that most valuable quality, sound common sense, and remembering the unfortunate vacillation and weakness of character that had blighted her dead brother's career, she determined as far as possible to provide against anything like an inheritance of it in his daughter. Thus brought up, and being always in the company of her aunt, Ethel's temperament was moulded much after the fashion of that good and worthy woman, and she early learned the value and importance of self-reliance. With such influences surrounding her no wonder she became so sedate and old-fashioned, and began to appreciate the exigencies of life when other girls of her own age were dressing their dolls or turning their skipping-ropes.

But who was Barney? Well, he was neither Irish nor of Irish extraction, as the name would imply. Barrard

Freeman, sen., was, as all his fathers had been before him, born in the High Street, and brought up at the grammar-school, Hartleigh, and it was at the last-named of these two places that Barney, his son, as he was called by his familiars, for brevity's sake, was being duly birched and rulered through a good sound English education at the time we make his acquaintance. A tall, good-looking lad, just turned fourteen, with a manly, straightforward way about him that insured his popularity both with his masters and his schoolfellows, for they always felt they could trust him. Besides this, he had shortly before saved the life of one of the grammar-school boys, of the name of Morton, who had very nearly been drowned when bathing in the Hart, and would have to a certainty but for Barney, who, coming up opportunely, jumped in just as he was settling down among the weeds, and after a fine tussle with the greedy waters, managed to struggle with him to the bank. So courageous a deed naturally much enhanced Barney's reputation in the school, and raised him to the position of a hero, who was idolized in a way flattering enough to turn an older head. At first he did get a little vain, but that was soon knocked out of him by Ethel, who gave him a fine scolding for trying on his airs and graces with her.

Having thus described my young people, I come more immediately to my story. Barney and Ethel had been accustomed to play together from the time she had been able to run alone. Perhaps, though, I am wrong in using the term play; I should have said they had always been great friends, so much so that the Hartleigh people used

jokingly to call her Barney's little wife. Miss Somers, on her part, rather encouraged the friendship than otherwise, for Barney was a great favourite with her, and she saw no reason why they should not grow up together, and with hearts and intellects ripening in one another's society, find on some distant day that the attachment of childhood had imperceptibly been changed into the love of maturer years. She may have been a silly old thing to allow such thoughts to enter her brain, but then old maids are supposed to be more foolish and romantic than the rest of the world, and to take strange and exceptional views on the subject of matrimony. Thus carving out the destinies of these two children, and building castles in the air for them, she would sit watching them in the twilight of the summer evenings, listening to the latest news of school and school doings, with which Barney would always keep Ethel fully acquainted, and in which she was always greatly interested. Sometimes he would read to them, on which occasion the young lady would take up her position on a footstool beside him, and even go the length of resting her head on his knee. Often he would continue thus amusing them till the growing darkness made the printed lines run one into another, and the big glass bottles at the chemist's over the way flashed into sudden and gorgeous illumination. Then sometimes her father's spirit of music would seem to possess Ethel, and through the deepening shadows her childish notes might be heard gently rippling out some old ballad that she had taught herself. At others the three would remain silent, listening to the bells wrangling and jangling through their weekly practice, their

wild melody echoing with such strange feeling through the still night air. Aye, there had been many changes rung from the old church tower, and would be still!

It was drawing very near to the Midsummer holidays, and the grammar-school boys had already begun to count the hours to "breaking up." Only two days more of examination, and then six weeks' idleness. Barney, I am sorry to say, did not cut at all a good figure, either in *viva voce* or the printed papers, and consequently anticipated anything but a high place when the result of the week's labours should be made known. But, as he saw no use in making himself miserable about it, he was as jolly as ever, though inwardly determined to redeem his position at the first opportunity. Ethel, too, had found very serious fault with him. "You naughty, idle boy," she said; "I hope you will get a good flogging, and not be allowed any holidays at all." At which kind expression of feeling the young gentleman was highly amused, and when he came in in the evening pretended he had been punished as desired, and with such an appearance of truth that Miss Somers' sympathy was so excited that she forthwith sent out for a lobster, and spiced some elder wine, to support Barney under his supposed moral and physical misfortunes.

Close behind the houses of the High Street ran the river Hart. It passed just at the bottom of Miss Somers' garden, and Ethel was very fond of wandering down to the water-side, where she had a favourite seat in the midst of a clump of willows. Here she delighted to hide herself with a book, and enjoy the solitude. The last day of the examination had come, and in the afternoon the results of

the examination would be made known, the prizes be distributed, and the grammar-school boys dismissed for the vacation. Ethel, taking advantage of the lovely morning, and leaving her aunt, who was busy with certain household affairs indoors, strolled down to her hiding-place by the river, with her lessons. She had been sitting working away hard for some little time, when she heard voices on the opposite bank, one of which she immediately recognized as belonging to Barney.

"Well, Morton," he was saying, "whatever have you brought me all the way here for?"

"Don't speak so loud, Freeman," some one answered, in a frightened and agitated tone; "we might be overheard."

"Well, there's no need to be alarmed," interrupted Barney; "we're not saying anything to be ashamed of, are we? But whatever is the matter with you? you're as white as a sheet."

"Freeman," continued the other, "I've asked you to come here, because I'd no one else I could trust in. You saved me from drowning, and——"

"Well, go on," cried Barney, impatiently.

"Oh! don't speak to me like that," exclaimed Morton. "I am wretched enough already, and if you get angry with me I couldn't stand it, Freeman. I stole Mr. Mortimer's purse off the table in his room this morning."

"You did what?" shouted Barney.

"I stole his purse," was the answer; and then, more hurriedly, "the door was open as I passed along the passage, and I saw it lying on his dressing-table, and I thought

of the money I owed Mother Brown for 'tuck,' and I crept in and took it. And, oh ! Freeman, I have been so wretched ever since, and I want to return it. It would break mother's heart if she knew what I had done, and father, I believe, would kill me." Here he burst into a wild fit of sobbing, and added, in a voice almost inaudible with emotion, "Help me, Freeman ; do help me, and tell me what I am to do."

There was a silence for some few moments, which was presently broken by Barney. He spoke very slowly and quietly. "The best thing you can do," he said, "is to go to Mr. Mortimer at once, tell him all, and ask forgiveness."

"No, no, I cannot do that," was the answer ; "I have spent some of the money, and I have been so much in trouble this half-year that I know he would never forgive me. I feel inclined to throw myself into the water."

"Don't do that, Morton, or I shall have to pull you out for the second time," said Barney ; "but hush ! there is some one coming along the bank ; let us move out of the way."

Then Ethel heard no more. Her heart was beating fast at the revelations to which she had been an accidental auditor. As she came forth from her hiding-place to go into the house, she saw the two boys walking slowly along the river's bank, in close conversation ; while coming from the other direction might be seen the portly and familiar form of Jenkins, the police constable stationed at Hartleigh. Then it was too late—all was discovered, and Morton could not escape. No time for him to appeal to Mr. Mortimer for mercy ; justice was already on his track, and his fate was sealed. "Poor fellow," thought Ethel ;

"but he is a thief, and he deserves no pity," she added to herself. "But his mother, if she knew it, would break her heart." The words echoed in her ears, and as she passed up through the garden into the house, her eyes were wet with the tears of pity, and she cried softly.

"Why does not Barney come to tea, as he promised?" said Miss Somers, on the evening of the same day, as she turned the tap of the urn, and the hot water rushed hissing into the tea-pot. "It is nearly seven o'clock, and he should have been here at six."

"Oh, I dare say, Auntie, he has found something to do he likes better," exclaimed Ethel, with a toss of her little head; but then, recollecting the scene of the morning, she added, "perhaps there may have been something to keep him up at the school-house."

"Well, there's no knowing," said Miss Somers, "so we had better have our tea;" a suggestion which was at once carried out. Eight o'clock, nine o'clock, and still no Barney. During the interval, Miss Somers had wondered at least a dozen times what could have become of him, and had gradually excited herself into a painfully nervous and fidgety condition, suggestive of pins and needles in every portion of her anatomy. Suddenly there came a violent ring at the front door bell, and immediately afterwards the servant brought up a little note, which she handed to Ethel. Eagerly she tore it open, and read as follows:

"DEAR ETHEL,—I have been taken up for stealing a purse from Mr. Mortimer's room, at the school-house. I am not guilty, but must wait to prove it, as, were I to do

so at once, some one else might get into trouble. I want him to set himself right before I say anything. I am writing this at the police station at Manningford. Don't be frightened ; I shall be safe back again to-morrow night. I am not guilty, Ethel. I know you will believe me, and dear Aunt Martha, to whom give my very best love, and accept the same yourself.

“ BARNEY.”

“ Barney arrested, and for Morton’s theft ! ” There was some hideous blunder, some dreadful mistake ; she would go at once, and tell all she had heard in her hiding-place among the willows. But then, as she read Barney’s note over again, she paused when she came to the words “ must wait to prove it, as were I to do it at once, some one else might get into trouble. I want him to set himself right before I say anything.” She was terribly perplexed as to what she ought to do. Perhaps if he knew that she was aware of Morton’s guilt, he would wish her to keep silence until Mr. Mortimer had been seen, and his forgiveness obtained, and yet what good could that do ? She felt in great trouble ; if she could but see Barney, he would tell her what he wished. Miss Somers, when she heard what had happened, worked herself into a state that ultimately ended in hysterics, her head taking up a graceful position among the fire-irons, and her feet entangled among the bars of her easy-chair. From this position she was only recovered by the plentiful application of cold water and smelling-salts, after which she was forthwith removed to her bedroom in a very feeble and exhausted condition.

The lovely summer's day had ended with a coarse, tempestuous night; the wind howled and groaned through the chimneypots of the High Street, and the rain dashed in an unceasing torrent on its pavement. But Ethel was thinking of neither wind nor rain; Barney, her dear old friend Barney, was in trouble, and she wanted to see him, to ask him what he wished her to do. Manningford was five miles off; how was she to get to him? for, thoughtless of everything but his safety, she had determined to dare the elements, and go to him. Thus resolved, to her childish heart delay seemed full of danger; and so, wrapping herself in her thick cloak, and putting on an old hat, she stole quietly downstairs, just as the clock in the hall struck twelve. With trembling fingers she drew back the bolts, and opened the door. As she did so, a violent gust of wind, blowing against it, almost knocked her down, and it was with the greatest difficulty she managed to shut it after her. It made a good deal of noise in closing, but the roar of the blast and the rushing of the rain prevented its being heard, and brave little Ethel hurried forth into the pitiless storm.

Day was dawning when the policeman on duty at the Manningford station was roused from a snooze over the fire, in the back office, by a knock at the outside door. On opening it, he found a little girl, dripping from head to foot, and shivering with cold. "If you please, sir, I want to see Barney Freeman," she said on the instant.

"Poor little lass," exclaimed the kind-hearted officer, dragging her inside. "Come in and dry thyself; thou'rt soaked to the skin a'most."

"But, sir, I want to see Barney," pleaded Ethel, struggling with him; for it was she, and no other.

"Thou shalt see him all in good time," was the answer; "but first come and dry thyself."

Thus persuaded, Ethel went with him into the room where the fire was. She was wet through, so that her clothes clung to her with chilling tenacity, and she shivered like one with the ague. The good-natured policeman was at his wits' end to know what to do. There were no women or women's clothes about the place, and the child was like enough catching her death of cold as she sat steaming by the fire. At length a bright thought struck him, and bringing in a large blanket and an overcoat, he told Ethel to take off her wet things, and wrap herself up, and lie down before the fire.

"But Barney, sir; you promised me I should see Barney," entreated Ethel.

"To-morrow morning, my poppet," was the answer, and with that he shut the door and left her.

For a long time Ethel sat gazing into the fire, wondering at the strange step she had taken in coming to Manningford, and what good was likely to follow from it. After all, she might just as well have remained at Hartleigh, and waited till her testimony became absolutely necessary for Barney's safety. She had trudged through five long weary miles this stormy night; and now, as the morning was dawning, awakening her to reflection, she was at a loss to understand for what purpose she had taken the journey. Still there was consolation in the fact that she would soon see him; and thus solacing herself,

a sort of stupor crept over her, and she sank on to the blank : in front of the fire.

It may appear strange that Barney had been taken up for stealing Mr. Mortimer's purse, when, as we well know, it was Morton who was guilty. It came about in this wise. Shortly after the conversation Ethel overheard had been resumed, Barney, failing to induce Morton to make a clean breast of it to Mr. Mortimer, determined to save his friend at all risks ; so, taking the purse from him, he put it in his own pocket, with the intention of restoring it unobserved, and with the deficiency in amount made up, to Mr. Mortimer's room. Unfortunately, however, for him, Jenkins, who had overheard some of the conversation, finding the purse on Barney, without more ado took him in charge, and having locked him up in his room in High Street, went off for Mr. Mortimer.

As for Morton, no sooner did he see the policeman's uniform than he took to his heels, and ran off. The purse being found in Barney's possession, and his refusal to give any reasonable account of how he had come by it, was conclusive proof to the astute Jenkins that he it was who had stolen it; while Mr. Mortimer, who would have prosecuted his own son under a like suspicion, was determined to punish the accused. Barney said nothing; he felt sure that sooner or later Mr. Mortimer would relent; and in the meanwhile a judicious appeal for forgiveness by Morton, who he did not doubt would confess now that he had got into trouble for him, would no doubt result in the triumphant proof of his innocence, and the hushing-up of the guilt of his companion. Thus it was that he came to

be locked up in Manningford station, preparatory to his examination before the magistrates on the morrow.

With this much of retrospect we come back to Ethel, who woke from her heavy but unrefreshing sleep to find the sun high in the heavens, and every appearance of the day being far advanced. She tried to rise; but her legs refused to support her, and she fell back exhausted with the effort. Poor child! she was frightened; she had never felt so before. Once more she essayed to gain her feet by the help of a chair; but all the power seemed to have left her limbs, and with a moan she sank down once more.

Cruel storm, look at me! tiny bark your pitiless rage has wrecked! Behold this fragile human cockle-shell, that, battered, and bruised, and beaten in your fury, shall soon sink into those depths where there is calm and rest for evermore!

Barney's innocence was proved beyond all possibility of a doubt by Mr. Mortimer, who came over the first thing in the morning, and privately explained to the magistrates what had in truth taken place, for Morton had confessed all to him—his own guilt and Barney's noble self-sacrifice. So the brave boy was called into the private room, and having been complimented for his generous conduct, was about to go back to Hartleigh with Mr. Mortimer, when the good-natured policeman came up to him, and said he had some one who wanted to see him. Who that somebody was we already know, and what the meeting was like I leave to the imagination.

The wheels of time had rolled on some four months: Barney has returned to the grammer-school, and is work-

ing hard, but he is a good deal changed in manner; he has become very quiet, and talks very little. What has caused this alteration in his character? Ethel is ill; the exposure and cold on the night when she walked to Manningford, laid the foundation of that disease whose deadly process is but a matter of time. Day by day those who loved her felt their hearts torn as they heard the short choking cough grow more and more troublesome; they knew that consumption, more than usually rapid, was hastening its patient, uncomplaining little victim back again to the bosom of her God. No word nor regret ever fell from her lips; a blessed calm seemed to have fallen over her, and prepared her for the worst, and towards all that attended on her she was more gentle and affectionate than ever. The old love for Barney still remained; still was he her most favoured companion, and he, on his part, dedicated every spare moment from school to be with his little wife. It was winter now, cold, bitter November, and Miss Somers had fires burning all over the house, so as to keep it warm for Ethel. How can I describe the sadness of those long evenings, when Barney would come in, and the three would sit talking till it became time for Ethel to be carried up to bed, for she was too weak to walk? Then Barney would take her up in his arms, and carry her so carefully. Always before he went away at night, he was called up to say good-bye; and she would say, "Barney, I want you to say 'Our Father' with me." When Martha Somers heard their voices mingling together, a great lump would rise in her throat, and many and many a time she was obliged to leave the room to hide her emotion. One

night the usual trio were assembled in the drawing-room, Miss Somers in her arm-chair by the fire, Barney on the sofa, and Ethel resting her head against his shoulder. She had been very quiet all the evening, for Barney had been reading to them; but now he had finished, and was talking cheerfully of the approaching Christmas holidays. The clock struck nine, and Miss Somers, rising from her chair, said, "Ethel, my darling, it is time for bed."

"Oh, let me sit up a little longer, Auntie; I don't feel at all tired, and I like to hear you and Barney talk," said Ethel. Then, as if to lend force to her request, the church bells burst forth into noisy melody. Back they brought those happy evenings, when Ethel was well and strong; and there were tears in Barney's eyes, and in Martha Somers' too, when they remembered. But Ethel only smiled, and whispered, "Dear old bells, how I love to hear you! you seem always to talk to me so kindly." Then, passing her hand over her forehead, she nestled her face close to Barney's, and closing her eyes, seemed to be oblivious of all but their music. On they wrangled and jangled, now loud, now low, till an hour had nearly passed. Miss Somers was dozing, and Barney was sitting quite still, lest he should disturb Ethel. She was asleep now, and it would be a pity to arouse her.

The noisy bells had ended, and silence reigned over Hartleigh: Miss Somers started from her nap in a great hurry, and said, "Ethel, you must go to bed."

No need for a bed now for her, save that last resting-place for the sleeper whose wakening shall find her in that bright country over those distant hills of azure sky.

Ah, Barney! your little wife is lost to you ; lay her head down gently, and pass out into the starry night, where your tears may mingle with the lately-fallen snow. Cry on, my boy ; child though she was, she loved you, as the sacrifice of her life proved.

Thus quietly did the end come to Barney's little wife. Brave little girl, with heart of gold, your reward is not here ; as the shattered lily on the headstone over your grave, so your life-chord was snapped asunder !





LEFT ALONE.

"No hap so hard but may in time amend."

—Southwell.

POOR MOTHER! They told me—that is, the two or three kind-hearted women who lived in our court, and had shared between them the duty of nursing her through her illness—that she was going home; and perhaps even before the morning dawned, she and I, who loved one another so dearly, would be parted, never more to meet this side the grave. I was but a boy of ten; and yet, as they soothed and caressed me, and whispered words of comfort and consolation, I heeded them not; my heart—she had moulded and fashioned it so tenderly—was yearning for her whose spirit, now hovering on the bank of the dark river, was silently awaiting its summons to cross the stream. She lay on her bed so quiet and motionless, her long golden hair was flooding loose and disordered over the pillows, and her pretty face—for she was a very young mother—

as calm as a summer sea. I knelt by her; I held her hand in mine; for a moment it disengaged itself, and gently stroked my face ; her lips moved, as if to say "God bless thee, my child !" and then the breeze died away, and the waters were hushed into rest for evermore. Thus it was she was taken, and I was left alone.

She had been all in all to me ; I had known no other friend or relation. With the exception of the people who lived in the court, I had no recollection of our associating with any strangers ; we had seemed to live alone and isolated from the rest of the world, as if we only existed for one another. Who or what my father was, she never told me. Once, child-like, I pressed her to do so. She answered me, the only time I ever remember her doing so, impatiently and angrily. I felt my question had pained her, and I inquired no more.

But a few days later, and I saw her quietly laid to rest in the great cemetery, close to whose walls railway life ebbs and flows with its daily noise and bustle. As I heard the rattling trains go shrieking and whistling past, it seemed like leaving her in company ; I went back to the lonely room we had so long shared, but there was no mother now. Then it was I knew the worst, and what a solitary waif and stray I was.

They were very kind to me, those good motherly souls who had nursed her; but they were poor, and had children of their own, and what claim had I upon them ? So it came to pass that the day week after mother had been buried, I found myself wandering about the London streets in search of food and shelter. The sum total of

my worldly goods consisted of the clothes I had on my back, a shilling (all that remained after the rent and funeral expenses had been defrayed), and an old pocket-book, filled with faded letters that I had not taken any particular trouble to examine, having preserved it solely because mother had always carried it about with her, and seemed to value it. My capital to start with was therefore not very extensive ; besides which, I was too young to know how to apply it to the best advantage ; for, unlike the boys about our court, I had been brought up with much care, never being allowed to run wild in the streets, to educate myself in "pitch and toss" and other juvenile accomplishments. On the contrary, mother had taught me to read and write, and would never allow me to go out except with her. So it may easily be imagined that I felt very helpless and lonely.

When she died, Christmas was not far off, and holiday folks had already commenced to enjoy the pleasures of the festive season. Cabs laden with luggage, and filled with smiling and happy occupants, were hurrying about ; the grocers' shops displayed in their broad plate-glass windows all their most tempting wares ; presents for Christmas, good things for Christmas, met the eye everywhere ; the whole of the great city seemed to be at peace and goodwill within itself. But I was wretched, and the general joyousness only tended to depress me ; it seemed more than ever to realize to me my orphan condition. I crept into a quiet street, and sat down on a door-step ; for I could not prevent the tears from coming. I buried my face in my hands, and had a good cry, and thus I

remained for a short time, but was aroused by feeling a cold nose rubbing against my knuckles. I looked up quickly, and beheld standing before me such a big, disreputable, dirty, black and white dog, wagging his tail, and evincing the deepest sympathy for me. That part of his coat which should have been white was smudged and grimy; in fact, his whole appearance suggested that he had known better days, though at the time of our meeting was leading a decidedly vagrant life. There was something singularly intelligent in his look, as he sat on his haunches, regarding me with apparently affectionate interest. He seemed to be saying, "Poor little boy! I can feel for you; for, like you, I have no friends, no home." The sympathy of fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind was on me too, and I accepted its promptings. From that moment Ben, such was the name I gave him, and he caught it up as if by inspiration, became my philosopher and guide and friend. When I rose to move in obedience to the order of a policeman, he followed close at my heels, and this sealed the contract of mutual friendship between us.

It was a raw, bitter day; the snow that had been falling had now ceased, leaving the streets almost impassable; for the mud and slush that had been beaten up by the traffic was beginning to freeze, and horses could scarcely stand on the slippery surface. Everybody seemed in a hurry to be indoors, for it was getting dark, and the lamplighter had already commenced his evening rounds. Where was I to go? I could not keep on wandering about the streets any longer; my feet and hands were

numbed with the cold, and I had had nothing to eat all day. The shilling must be broken into, and that at once—a resolution I immediately put in force by going into a baker's shop and buying a loaf. In the discussion of this Ben duly assisted me on the steps of a half-finished house, through whose windowless passages the wind cut with knife-like sharpness. Ere we had finished our meal, it began to snow again, and I was glad to take shelter inside. In a corner of one of the rooms I threw myself down on some shavings, tired in body and sick at heart. It was quite dark now, and the cold seemed to become more intense every minute, and to pierce me through. Poor Ben, too, felt it as much as I did; for he crept close to me, and huddled his nose away under the flap of my jacket. I covered him up in the shavings, and myself too, and, making him into a pillow, was soon in the land of dreams. How long I slept I know not, but when I awoke the sun was shining brightly in at the window, and I could hear vehicles rattling past in the street outside. The town was evidently up and doing. I shook off the shavings, in which proceeding I was copied by Ben, and then we two in company emerged from our night's lodging for another day of vagabond life. The first consideration was breakfast, so I paid a second visit to the baker's for a loaf. As it was handed to me, I felt in my pocket for my money—*it was gone!* What I said, how I felt, need I record? It was hard, was it not? A few more such straws as this, and the child's back would be broken. Oh, Ben, Ben! had you been as watchful as your gratitude should have made you, you would have seized hold of

the ragged urchin who crept in in the moonlight, when you and I were so soundly sleeping, and stole my money.

It came to begging at last, and for a week I managed to support my companion and myself on promiscuous charity ; but it was cruel, heart-breaking work, asking alms : so many would pass by without a look, others with an angry “Get out of the way, do !” that it was difficult to avoid feeling discouraged. Up to Christmas Eve, from the day mother was buried, I had not slept in a bed, and that was nearly a fortnight. But I had not felt that so much as the daily exposure to cold and damp, which had brought on me a cough that at night was a great trouble to me, and kept me from sleeping. I could not tell the utter desolation of those waking hours, with no companion save my own thoughts and Ben, who, poor dog ! was always as tired as myself, but was able to do what I could not—sleep soundly. Was God ever going to desert me thus? would He not give me some relief from my sufferings? This I often asked myself. It may have been wicked to do so, but it was irresistible.

Christmas Eve ! This time last year mother was sitting in front of the blazing fire, with me on her knee, telling me fairy stories ; and now I was crouching upon the straw of an empty waggon, with nothing between me and the blue sky, where the stars were twinkling in a vast azure sea. I had felt very ill and weak all day, and a racking pain in my head had made me scarcely sensible of what I was doing. Ben seemed to fancy there was something wrong, for he would not lie down, as was his wont ; but in the moonlight I could see him sitting close

by me on his hind-quarters, gazing hard at me. Whether dogs always do bay the moon I know not, only that he uttered no sound ; all he did was once or twice to lick my hand. Such a frost there was that night ! but I felt it not : my temples were burning, and my hands also ; my eyes seemed like two hot coals, my throat was parched, my lips so dry that the skin peeled off them. Ben seemed to have grown the size of a bullock, and had great horns sticking out of his head. I tried to grasp hold of them, and after that remember no more !

My first recollections of returning consciousness recall to mind the long, cleanly-kept hospital ward, in which, as I afterwards learnt, for nearly five days I had been in a state of partial insensibility. As for myself, I remember nothing since the night in the waggon ; I felt as if I had passed through a long sleep. I put my hand to my head ; it was closely shorn, while an icy-cold bandage was fastened round it. I asked the nurse what had been the matter with me, but she kissed me, and told me to be quiet. Yes, she kissed me ; and I was so weak and low that her kindness made me quite hysterical, which resulted in my being taken in her arms, and quieted with all that gentleness of word and action that makes some women so loveable.

Brain fever, that was what had been the matter with me ; and when I got stronger, Mrs. Murtoch, that was the nurse's name, told me that it had been a very near thing for me, and that the doctor had once or twice despaired of getting me through it, as I had remained delirious so long.

"But, the Lord be praised, you're getting on finely now, my chickabiddy, and will soon be able to stand on your legs again."

"If you please, ma'am," I inquired with impatience, "can you tell me how Ben is?"

"Ben? Good gracious me! No. I'm not acquainted with any Bens," was the answer.

"Ben is a dog, ma'am, if you please," I offered, by way of explanation—"my dog, ma'am."

"Your dog! what did you want with a dog? Mercy on us! you were as near starved as could be, let alone having a dog to feed," she replied.

"But, ma'am, he was very fond of me, and he used to keep me so warm at night; and oh! I hope he isn't lost. I should be so sorry if he was."

No doubt the worthy nurse thought me the most ridiculous juvenile she had ever had under her charge. To have passed through a most terrible illness, brought on entirely by exposure and want of food, and then for my first inquiry to be about a dog, probably suggested to her that the brain fever had not, after all, been got over without leaving unfortunate effects behind. So she told me I must not talk too much at first, and left me to speculate as to the fate of my canine companion; but I renewed the subject the moment she came back, and finally extorted from her a promise that she would inquire of the people who had brought me to the hospital.

Ben was all safe and well at the yard where I had been found lying in the waggon. So far I was satisfied; but I longed greatly to see him, and was determined I would at

the first opportunity. I was growing quite strong again by this time, and Mrs. Murtoch got me up and dressed me one morning, and took me into her room, telling me to sit still, and not try to move about. I had nothing to do, and felt very much inclined to disobey her orders, and walk to the window ; but it struck me I might amuse myself by looking over the old pocket-book and the letters it contained. I took it out, and opened it ; but it slipped from my fingers, and all the papers fell to the ground. I picked one up—it was peculiarly soft and thin. I unfolded it, and, to my intense astonishment and delight, discovered that it was a Bank of England note for £10. So poor mother had not left me so penniless, after all ; and here I had been walking about with it in my pocket, when it might have saved me all the misery and suffering I had undergone. Now, as I looked at it, it seemed like a little fortune, enough to keep me through all future years.

But the letters ! I read them as best I could ; for, though I was a very good hand at print, my education had not progressed very far in deciphering pen-and-ink composition. But I stuck to my task, encouraged to go on by what I learned. When I had come to the end, I knew who my father was, and why mother never liked to speak of him. In those half-dozen faded sheets of paper, her story was told. The outline at least was unmistakable, the rest has since been filled in. It was shortly this. She had been a work-girl in a large factory in Manchester, and when only sixteen, attracted the notice of her employer's eldest son, who, like herself, was very young. His love was as pure as his intentions were honourable, and ere

she was seventeen, and when he was only just entering his twenty-first year, they were married. The wrath and indignation of the old man brought upon him a very severe stroke of paralysis, which left him unable to move, but as bitter as ever against the young couple, who by this time began to experience the hardships and embarrassments consequent on a failure in pecuniary resources. Henry Darnel, such was my father's name, determined to make one last appeal for forgiveness, and that in person. Leaving my mother at the quiet little fishing village, where they had remained ever since his marriage, he started in the hope of being able to assert the old power which the love between himself and his father had originally given him. But he was doomed never to reach him. The train in which he was journeying ran off the line, and a young widow slept in that seaside village that night, all unconscious of the awful tidings the morning would bring her. The old man relented when it was too late ; he sought her far and wide, but she had disappeared, none knew whither, and, despite the most careful search, he never could find a single trace. Near or about that time, she took up her abode in Sillings Court, in a certain district of London not necessary to mention, and supported herself by needle-work. There it was I was born, there it was that I saw the light fade out of her eyes, and watched the breath of life die away within her. Thus was I instructed by the faded letters and memoranda in the pocket-book, that at one time I had thought of throwing away as useless rubbish. It was startling news for a child of ten, and it was not till some time afterwards that I fully realized and

understood how important it was. Still I had wisdom enough to keep my own counsel, biding the time when matters should be brought to a satisfactory issue. Folding up the letters, I put them carefully away in the pocket-book, together with the certificate of marriage of my parents, which I had also found in it.

I had scarcely accomplished this, when I heard a great deal of scrambling and pushing in the passage, and the door was suddenly burst open violently, and in rushed Ben, nearly upsetting Mrs. Murtoch and the basin of arrowroot she was carrying for my special edification. He knew me in a moment; and his expressions of joy were so forcible and exuberant, and the wagging of his tail so violent, that not only did he nearly knock me over, chair and all, but threatened wholesale and sudden destruction to some beautiful china flower-pots full of geraniums, in which Mrs. Murtoch took especial pride, and amongst whose fragile stalks he did terrible mischief. Whereupon I had to assert my ancient authority, and my canine subject forthwith sat himself down, and was transformed in a twinkling from Ben the noisy to Ben the respectable. He was such a gentleman too now, so spruce and nice, with his shirt-front so spotlessly white and his coat so glossy. As he looked at Mrs. Murtoch, his eyes were so loving, and his tail wagged once again, but this time with the more subdued emotion of gratitude. I had not much difficulty in guessing who it was that had taken care of him and fed him so well.

Three weeks more, and the doctor told me that I was quite recovered, and must leave the hospital. I received

his intimation with much regret, for Mrs. Murtoch had been like a mother to me. That last evening she took me into her little sitting-room ; for being the chief nurse and superintendent, she had good accommodation. After we had had tea and buttered toast, which latter was nearly all consumed by Ben, who, having eaten to satiety, stretched himself in front of the fire and slept, the dear old soul, with a great deal of stuttering and an equal if not larger proportion of hugging and kissing, informed me "all of a heap" that she knew I was a poor little orphan, and that she was going to adopt me. To-morrow morning I was to go down by the train to Bolton-on-the-Sea, where her sister lived, who would keep me in her house till she had her holiday from the hospital, and could come and fetch me.

"And," she added, "Ben is to go too, though he is the most tiresome, troublesome dog I ever did see!" This she only said in order not to appear too overpowering in her kindness ; for, as regarded the individual mentioned, she petted and fed him to such an extent, never omitting to pay him a visit at every opportunity, that he was becoming almost aldermanic in his proportions. What answer could I make to this generous and unexpected proposal, but to throw my arms round her neck, and give her a plentiful shower-bath of tears? And she began to cry too, what for I did not then know, unless it was sympathy; but she afterwards told me of an only son she had lost at sea, and perhaps it was of him she was thinking. When I went to bed that night, I knew God had no longer deserted me, for through the darkness and storm He had found me a new home and a new mother. Ere I had left

her, I had placed in her hands the pocket-book, the letters, and the £10 note. Could I have kept anything from her?

The fresh air of Bolton-on-the-Sea soon brought the roses into my cheeks, and I was but a very short time in picking up my health and strength. Mrs. Murtoch's sister was every bit as good and kind as herself, and admitted me to the full privileges of a member of the family, which consisted of a little girl, aged ten, and a boy some two years younger. Her husband was a fish agent ; that is to say, he represented two or three large fishmongers in London, for whom he would buy at the morning auctions of fish on the beach. They were comfortably off, and no more ; there was plenty of good food, but no luxuries. Sam Birchett was one of those men who never forget the rainy day that may come, and was careful accordingly.

Ben had a fine time of it ; when he was not eating, he was scampering over the sands ; when he was not scampering over the sands, he was in the water ; in fact, he was as idle a dog as could be found anywhere. He had become a very general favourite among the visitors at Bolton-on-the-Sea, especially with those who frequented the old jetty that stretched out some little way into the sea. He certainly was a most wonderful dog for the water, and was as strong and enduring in his swimming as a Newfoundland.

One day it was blowing very fresh, and the Bolton-on-the-Sea pleasure-boats were without customers. Cruising a short distance from the shore, might be seen a tiny cutter, looking like a cockle-shell as it danced about on

the waves. She belonged to a very old and infirm gentleman, who came every year during the spring, and spent most of his time sailing about in her. He had no other companion than one man-servant, who combined the duties of valet and sailor, sometimes wheeling the old man's Bath-chair on the land, at others trimming the sails of the little yacht on the sea. The aged stranger was very reserved and taciturn ; he scarcely if ever spoke to any one, and then only in monosyllables ; but he would always go out in his boat, despite wind and weather, if the mood took him, though the sailors often would shake their heads and mutter warnings about unexpected puffs of wind from the cliffs under which Bolton-on-the-Sea was situated. The old gentleman would get into trouble, they said, before he had done.

It was trying work for the little craft ; and though she rose like a cork to the crest of the waves, and sank as a sea-bird in the valley of the waters, she looked as if a breath more would capsize her. Presently her head was turned for the shore ; for however much he might like the wind, the old man did not care for rain, and already a wretched drizzling mist was beating before the breeze. She came bounding on straight for the jetty. The wind now caught her sails sideways, and seemed to turn her almost completely over.

"The old gent must be short of his buttons," said a sailor, almost angrily. "Why don't he have that main-sheet lowered away, instead of cracking on so? It's a-tempting Providence, it is. By the Lord, they're over!" he exclaimed, springing forward, and then, turning quickly

round, he ran down the jetty, crying, "Come on, lads, and help me get a boat off; there ain't a moment to be lost!"

It was true: the tiny cutter was now capsized, and nothing could be seen but her keel, which was floating uppermost. Then one man's head appeared above the water, and then another. They were but a few yards from the jetty. I could see them both struggling with their joint adversaries, who came rolling on, sweeping them towards the shore, and then they sank again. Where was Ben? He was gone from my side; but where was he? Beating the waves with his brave old paws, his black head fighting over the billows towards the drowning. The boat was not yet launched from the shore. Heaven help ye, poor souls! for only can aid come in time from the four-legged swimmer, now so close at hand. My eyes seemed gifted for a moment with unnatural power. I saw the courageous dog make a snatch forward; for a moment he disappeared, but when he next showed himself there was some heavy weight in his mouth, with which he was struggling for shore.

It was over. Ben had done his work as no human being could. But when the dripping body of the old man had been laid down on the beach, the brave dog sank exhausted beside the inanimate form. Some took up the former, and carried him home, where, in a few hours, he was sitting up, recovered, though very weak; the latter soon came to, and I was obliged to take him away to avoid the caresses with which he was almost smothered. As for the old man's servant, he sank to rise no more.

Ah, Ben! it was a good day when you and I met, my man; your want of watchfulness, when my money was stolen, has been fully compensated for and atoned.

The old man sent for me and Ben, and we had a long and interesting interview. As I was leaving, he said, "Remember, you are to bring Ben to see me every day."

This I was quite willing to do, as he had spoken very kindly to me, and so I promised, and kept my word. One day when I went in, he was reading a letter, the envelope of which was lying on the floor; I picked it up, and as I handed it to him, my eye fell on the direction. It was "Henry Darnell, Esq., Marine Terrace, Bolton-on-the-Sea." I said something which made the old man ask me what was the matter.

"Your name, sir," I answered; "that was my father's name, but——"

"Your father's name?" he interrupted, seizing me by the hand, and looking hard into my face. "Tell me, child, what you mean—explain, explain!"

His vehemence frightened me, and I remained silent.

"Speak, speak! for God's sake, speak, boy; I am in an agony!" he continued. The tears were filling his eyes; there was an unusual flush on his cheek.

I told him the story of the faded letters.

His arm was around my neck, his hand was smoothing my hair, and, through a voice broken with emotion, I heard him murmuring thus: "God, I thank Thee that Thou hast not sent my grey hairs down to the grave without the wish of my heart being fulfilled. The search of a sorrowing old man has, though late, not been in vain."

Mrs. Murtoch was sent for, and came down with the letters and the old pocket-book, which fully established my identity. Not that my grandfather ever doubted it; he was satisfied from the first.

Thus through wind and storm, through penury and sickness, had an inscrutable Providence guided me in safety, making even a dog an instrument towards the accomplishment of my destiny. Wealth, position, happiness have been spread at my feet; and but for Ben they might never have come to me. What has my experience taught me? That in the smallest and commonest actions of life, God's hand is at work to direct and guide.

Mrs. Murtoch is still alive, and comes often to see me and my wife; for many years have passed now since the events recorded in this story occurred. My grandfather has gone to the land where all things are forgotten, leaving me sole heir to a large and rich property.

What of Ben? Dear reader, if I say that the question brings tears into my eyes, you will not think me weak and silly. The brave, faithful dog is at rest too. But he lived to a good old age, and then passed out of existence without pain. May I venture to hope that if you love my dear old dog, you will spare a tiny piece of regard to me?





LISSETTE'S BIRTHDAY.

"Her smiles and tears had passed, as light winds pass
O'er lakes,—to ruffle, not destroy, their glass."

—*Byron.*

HE traveller who wanders through Normandy, when he reaches Avranches, will be sure to rest him here awhile to enjoy the beauties of its scenery. Taking up his position on the summit of the wooded eminence on which it is situated, and turning his eyes towards the sea, a glorious natural panorama will be unfolded before him. Forest, corn-field, river—green, golden, glittering; and then those deadly, engulfing sands, so greedy and treacherous, stretching right away as far as sight can follow, and smiling so smoothly in the sunlight up into the grey granite face of Mont St. Michel, that, rising like a huge Elfreet from the bed of the river's estuary, frowns threateningly on all around it—a huge monument of Nature's handiwork.

Some years since, in the little village of Ardevon, but a short distance from the verge of the sands, lived the

widow Meyer, as her neighbours called her, though that was not indicative of any great originality on their part, considering her good man had only gone to his rest some three years before. But it answers the purpose of introducing us to her, as the pale, active, strong-minded Breton woman we see sitting in the porch of her rambling old farm-house, calling out impatiently, in a shrill voice, "Lisette ! Lisette !" Looking at her, the observer would have said that she was between thirty and forty, for she had few wrinkles, and there was plenty of colour in her cheeks ; and yet, in truth, she only failed fifty by some six months ; and she used to laugh cheerily, and say that her hair underneath was getting dreadfully grey and thin, and that she would soon have to take to wearing a wig. A well-to-do woman was the widow Meyer, for her good man had been a careful farmer, and year by year improved his property, gaining a reputation in the district for his skill and knowledge. When he died, and left her alone in the world to take care of Lisette and the farm, she was at first considerably at a loss, and left the management of everything to Pierre Dumont, the bailiff ; but when Christmas came, and she went over the accounts with him, though she said nothing, she was anything but satisfied with the result, and made up her mind to henceforth take everything under her own immediate supervision and control. Dumont, who was a cunning, greedy fellow, had anticipated being able to make a rich harvest for the remainder of his days. He was terribly angry and disappointed at the widow's determination, and went away from the interview at which she announced it to him

her intention with anything but friendly feelings towards her. However, he still retained his post in name, while his son Lucien, a tall, handsome lad of seventeen, became a great favourite and frequent visitor to the widow and her daughter Lisette, who at this moment came dancing and singing through the door, in answer to her mother's call. Briefly to describe her, and then more immediately to my story. At the time we see her she was just completing the last day of her fourteenth year, but she was one of those slender, fragile little beings, with fully-developed features, who have all the appearance of womanhood long before the proper time. The warm air of her native district, that gave her countrymen their brown hands and sunburnt cheeks, had left her complexion as white as a lily, and as she sat down on the grass beside her mother's chair, the contrast was most remarkable. A pretty picture they made in that mellow evening glow, dressed in the costume of the country, with their tall white caps, so stiff and clean ; Lisette with her face resting coaxingly against her mother's knee, while the widow gently stroked the tiny hand that had been placed in hers.

"Mother," said Lisette, looking up into the widow's face, "to-morrow is my birthday, you know, and you promised me I should have Lucien to dinner, so this morning I asked him to come."

"Quite right, my dear, quite right," was the reply ; "Lucien is a good lad, a very good lad, and I am always pleased to see him. I wish I could say the same of his father ; he's an ill-conditioned cur, and nothing else."

was forthwith made acquainted with what had occurred. To tell the truth, she was not altogether sorry at being spared an interview with Dumont; for on such occasions she had hard work to put up with the snarls and growls of her ill-tempered bailiff, who always took care to have a nice little series of complaints to detail to her.

What a lovely evening it was! so calm and peaceful, that as the widow, Lisette, and Lucien sat under the trees, enjoying the fresh fruit and delicate thick cream which with them took the place of tea, they might almost have fancied themselves alone in the world. The silence was scarcely broken by the rustling leaves, through which the gentle breeze from the sea whispered now and then, and toyed with the tiny lock of golden hair that peeped out from beneath Lisette's cap. They were all very happy together, and Lucien forgot all his troubles, and chattered away in the fulness of youth's animal spirits. Thus they sat till the shadows grew darker and darker, and all trace of daylight died away.

"There ought to be a full moon to-night," said Lucien, after a prolonged silence, looking up to the sky, which seemed to have become suddenly overcast.

"Ugh, my rheumatism is twinging me in the shoulder," added the widow; "you mark my words, we're going to have a storm."

Almost at that moment some heavy raindrops began to fall, and a sudden flash of lightning gave warning of the approaching tempest. So they all hurried indoors, and not a bit too soon; for in a few minutes a deluge seemed to burst from the heavens, and the peals of thunder and

the flashes of lightning were repeated at frequent intervals. Lisette crept very close to Lucien, and was dreadfully frightened, so she said, though she seemed to make herself very comfortable when she had nestled her head against his shoulder.

The rain still continued pouring down in torrents ; and so, when Lucien rose to go, the widow would not hear of it, but told him he must remain and sleep, an invitation that he was not loth to accept, considering his walk home would insure his being wetted to the skin, to say nothing of the brutal reception he would be sure to meet with at his father's hands. So he remained at the farm, and in due course was snoring contentedly between the snowy sheets that had the name of Meyer worked in large letters on the corner.

As for Dumont, his son's guess that there was something more than ordinary the matter with him was quite correct. He was certainly in anything but an agreeable condition of mind. An old friend, to whom he owed a very large sum of money, had died suddenly, and the relations who had come into his property had called in all outstanding debts, and his amongst others. Now, although he had been greedy and avaricious, Pierre Dumont was anything but careful ; and instead of hoarding his money, squandered it away in nightly drinkings at the village cabaret. Consequently this peremptory call upon him far exceeded all that he was able to meet, and he had posted off to Avranches in the hope of being able to gain indulgence and time for payment. But all was of no avail ; the answer was the money must be paid, and that within

twenty hours. Pierre Dumont rode home from his fruitless errand in a state of great anxiety.

Still fell the rain heavily, while the wind that had now risen was shaking and rattling the windows of the widow's old farm-house, and making it tremble in every member of its ancient framework. Presently a more violent gust came banging against the lattice of the room in which Lucien was sleeping, and woke him; he sat up in his bed, and rubbed his eyes. When he had satisfied himself that there was nothing to be alarmed at, he laid himself down, and prepared to go to sleep again. But somehow or other his eyes would keep open, and his ears were painfully alive to every sound. Suddenly he heard a noise, as if the window of the parlour over which he was sleeping were being raised. He listened, and became certain that some one was lifting it slowly in order to avoid making a noise. He did not hesitate a moment what to do, for his life in the open air and the Breton blood in his veins made him brave and fearless of danger. He sprang out of bed, and hastily drawing on his clothes, opened the door, and felt his way down the stairs to the door of the parlour. It was partly open, and he paused there to consider what to do. He was unarmed, whereas the adversary or adversaries he would have to encounter would be sure to have taken the precaution of carrying some weapons of defence. Moments were precious: the widow's strong cupboard in which she always kept a considerable sum of money—for robbers were but rare things in the district—was in the corner of the parlour, and Lucien recollects this. Swiftly he crept back to his room, and

taking up his long clasp knife that he had laid on the table, softly stole back, and quietly pushed open the parlour door. A man was standing at the cupboard, with a small lantern in his hand, by the light of which Lucien could see that the lock and fastenings had been forced open. The face of the intruder was hidden in the darkness. Slowly on tiptoe Lucien made his way: the distance between the door and the cupboard seemed interminable, but he reached the thief at last, and seizing him in his grasp as in a vice, he dragged him down on to his back on the floor. In a moment he was struck dumb by a voice hissing into his ear—

“Boy, would you betray your father?”

His grasp relaxed, he shrank back in horror, and then let go his hold, while Pierre Dumont—for it was he—dashed through the open window, and vanished in the darkness without. Lucien rose to his feet as if in a dream, and when the light came, his face was pale and haggard, and his eyes glazed with horror. Lisette stood in the doorway with her mother; as they approached him, he drew away, as if to avoid them.

“What’s this?” said the widow, making up to the cupboard; “the bag with my midsummer quarter’s takings gone, and the window wide open! Who can have done this?”

Lisette stood looking on in fear and amazement, while Lucien shrank farther and farther away from them, his head hanging down, and his chin resting on his breast.

“What were you doing here?” continued the widow, addressing him almost fiercely, and in a tone that seemed

to convey a latent suspicion in her mind that he had had something to do with the theft. Lucien answered not a word, but passed his hand over his forehead, as if he were in pain.

"Can you give me no explanation?" further inquired his questioner, in a cold, calm voice.

"Do, Lucien, do tell mother what you saw," pleaded Lisette, taking his hand, and looking up into his eyes. But he only shook his head mournfully, and murmured, "I know nothing, I saw nothing."

"Listen to me, Lucien Dumont," said the widow, crossing up to and standing close by him; "I have trusted you as a son, I have believed in your truth and honesty as if you were my own child. I entreat you, for Lisette's sake and mine, to tell me all you know of this matter. How much that is I will not dare to guess, but your face is witness to something more than your mouth dares to speak."

Still Lucien answered not; he raised his eye, and looked his benefactress full in the face; then throwing himself on his knees at her feet, he buried his head in his hands, and sobbed out, "I cannot, I dare not."

"So be it, then. I have entreated your confidence; you have refused it me, and you must leave my threshold, never to enter it again. Whether you have robbed me or not, it matters not—I shall not appeal to the law; I leave you to the punishment your own conscience will inflict on you. And now go; I have done with you."

"Oh, mother, don't send him away," entreated Lisette. "I am sure he is innocent; he could not be so wicked,

so ungrateful," and she threw herself sobbing into her mother's arms.

But the widow was unmoved ; she merely said, "I have spoken ; Lucien Dumont, go !"

He raised himself quickly from his position of humility, and drawing himself up to his full height, passed out into the rain and night. Without uttering a word, the widow closed the window, and led Lisette, who was crying as if her heart would break, up to bed again. Taking her in her arms, she soothed her till her red eyes closed from sheer exhaustion, and the poor little girl slept. Thus it was that, when the storm and rain had ceased, the early morning sun dawned on Lisette's birthday. How sad were the auspices under which she was to inaugurate a new year of life ! A blight had fallen on the rosebud, and it hung its head and was bowed towards the earth. Thus the day passed in sorrow and gloom, and evening came again.

Reflection had done the widow good ; she began to think that she had been perhaps too hard upon Lucien and too hasty beside, and that if she had coaxed him a little more she might have had an explanation. Further than this, the more she thought about the matter the more satisfied did she become in her mind that he was not a thief. As for Lisette, she was as quiet as a little mouse, but she was none the less unhappy because she was silent. To think that Lucien, her dear old friend Lucien, should be a thief, oh, it was too dreadful !

Some one came hurriedly in at the garden gate—it was Pierre Dumont's old housekeeper ; her face was pale

as death, and when she asked for Madame Meyer it was in an agitated voice.

A few minutes after, the widow and she came out of the house together, and they walked away quickly. Alas ! should I pause longer over this part of my story ? Pierre Dumont, in his flight from the robbery of his mistress's money, had been drowned in attempting to cross the wooden bridge over the ford in front of his house, that at ordinary seasons was quite safe, but the rain had swollen the usually small stream into a torrent, and its remorseless waters swept him away. In his pocket was found the bag of money, containing the midsummer rents.

The widow was of course greatly shocked at this violent termination to a guilty career, but it satisfied her that Lucien was innocent. She and Lisette were sitting alone in the parlour that evening, when a tap came at the window. Lisette flew and opened it. Lucien stood there just as he had left them the night before, but he looked very ill, and he sank fainting on the threshold. For six whole weeks he lay on a bed of sickness, hovering between life and death, but youth gained the victory in the end, and conquered the fever. When he was well enough they told him of his father's fate, and how his innocence had been established. The winter came, and he was strong and about again, and his home was at the farm now, and the widow would not hear of his leaving her. I have told how sad was the celebration of one of Lisette's birthdays ; shall I relate the happiness of another, and what came of it ? A wedding ring, a marriage

feast, and so on; and some inquisitive persons heard Lucien whisper to Lisette, when he thought no one was by, "My own darling little wife!" the meaning of which obscure sentence I leave to wiser heads than mine to interpret.





COUSIN FANNY.

SNUGLY ensconced in the corner of a first-class carriage, Master—I beg his pardon—Mr. Cecil Desmond was hurrying homeward, for the Christmas vacation (they do not say holidays at Harrow), as fast as a Great Western express train could carry him. Although he was evidently endeavouring to give himself the appearance of thorough ease and composure befitting a man of the world, it required no very great acuteness of perception to see that he was boiling over with boyish exuberance at the prospect of home, its freedom and pleasures, and had no little difficulty to prevent his spirits getting the better of him. However, when at last he was rid of his fellow-passengers, and had the carriage all to himself, he gave in to them, and sang and shouted at the top of his voice, to the inexpressible horror of a nervous old lady in the next compartment, who was firmly possessed with the notion that the partition only divided her from a dangerous lunatic, who sooner or later would force his way through it, and murder her on the spot. Meanwhile the

object of her fears, entirely ignorant of her existence, was contemplating the fun he would have at the Grange, and wondering how his dear old pony Taffy was.

Here, according to custom, I must break off, to try and draw the young gentleman's portrait. In respect to age, Cecil Desmond, only son and heir of George Desniond, of the Grange, Coggleton, in the county of Stiffshire, was just half-way between fifteen and sixteen, though I am bound to add that everybody took him to be a good deal older. In the first place, he was decidedly precocious, like most public-school boys; and moreover, he already had some slight pretensions to whiskers, while his upper lip was delicately shaded with a fringe of light-coloured down. Without entering too inquisitively into the mysteries of his toilet, it is right to state that this latter hairy nothing was a source of continual anxiety, and was perpetually being subjected to a system of forcing, in the shape of stimulating lotions, the only merit of which was that they were perfectly harmless, and while they in no way promoted growth, did not discolour the skin like some decoctions I remember. In short, Master Cecil was a regular young dandy: his hair was always irreproachably parted behind and down the centre, his clothes were undeniably of the best cut, while his hat and boots could only have come from the neighbourhood of Bond Street. Desmond "*père*" took an especial pleasure in seeing his son well dressed; he had been a bit of a "*beau*" in his time; and besides, it was but right that the only child of one of the richest country gentlemen in Stiffshire should not want for the advantages that tailor and hatter can afford. But

though, as I have said, Cecil was a dandy, and perhaps wore clothes just a trifle too old in cut for him, he always looked a thorough young gentleman, and, still better, behaved like one. His three years' experience at Harrow had given him an easy deportment and self-possession in company, that placed him in favourable contrast beside the sons of the neighbouring squires at home, whose anxious mammas shuddered when a public school was suggested for their young hopefulls. He had learned to think for himself, to take care of himself, and I am proud, as his historian, to be able to add that he knew the value of money, a quality that, it is much to be feared, is sadly at a discount among the rising male generation. Cecil was a good looking boy, and no more: he had bright, cheerful eyes, that kindled the confidence at once, and a well-shaped, laughing mouth. As for his nose, there was too little of it to render it worthy consideration; and with that member of his physiognomy we will conclude this digression, and return to the railway carriage and its occupant.

Cecil was uncommonly glad to be at the end of his journey. Waiting to receive him he found the carriage; and Hayfork, the head coachman, whose attachment for young master was so great that, contrary to all precedent, he had turned out to drive over and meet him himself, instead of sending one of the understrappers.

"I loves that lad," he would say to his wife, in the privacy of his own room, "as if he were my own chick. Dear heart alive! he is made of the right sort, he is. I never knowed one of his age as had such a seat on a

horse's back, and such a hand on a horse's mouth: the guv'nor is a baby to him." And Hayfork was right; Cecil could do just what he liked with any horse except one, as we shall presently see,—first, because he was fearless; and next, because he always conquered by kindness.

"Well, Hayfork," said Cecil, jumping up into the driving-seat, and taking the reins from the old coachman, who surrendered them as a matter of course, a thing he never would do to any one but Mr. Desmond, "how are they all at home?"

"Pretty well, Master Cecil," was the reply. "I am truly glad to see you again. Taffy's as right and sound as the Bank of England, and I've had him shod against the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow?" inquired Cecil, touching the mare with the whip, a proceeding she did not appear to like. "Why, what's going to happen?"

"Only the hounds, sir," replied Hayfork, rubbing his hands. "They're going to meet at the Grange, and you're sure to have a clipping run, for there's three foxes in the spinney by Twenty Acres, and I saw one of the varmints the other night, and he was a beauty."

"Hurrah!" shouted Cecil, in delight at the news. "You're a jolly brick, Hayfork. But, I say, is there any one stopping at the Grange?"

"Any one stopping!" was the answer; "bless you, Master Cecil, the house is that full that James the butler has had to sleep in my sitting-room. There's Captain Penton, and Mr. Softhead, and a lot of gentlemen I don't know, and Mrs. Vernon and Miss Fanny."

"Oh, that's enough," interrupted Cecil; "so long as Cousin Fanny is there it's all right. She's an awfully jolly girl, Hayfork."

Having communicated this startling piece of intelligence, he relapsed into silence, nor did he address another observation to his companion during the remainder of the drive.

And now I must make another digression, to explain certain matters, and more particularly to account for this eccentric behaviour. I hope I shall not be complained of as treading on the toes of somebody's dignity, but my duty as historian compels me to assert that there is a most extraordinary predisposition among hobbledehoys to fall in love, so they call it, with ladies considerably older than themselves. This was what had happened to my young gentleman, and I am going to try and show how very foolish such things are.

Cousin Fanny was undoubtedly a very pretty girl, and besides, just what Cecil had called her, a jolly one. She had plenty of fun in her, could play and sing to perfection, was invaluable in getting up charades or round games, and rode like an Amazon. But she was twenty! Everybody liked her, from old Mrs. Desmond, Cecil's grandmamma, down to boy Harry, who looked after the dogs. She was endued with plenty of good sound common sense, but not a particle of vanity in her whole composition. In short, she was as near perfection as a young lady could be, and was always a welcome and favoured visitor at the Grange.

It must be an admitted fact that Cousin Fanny had

been too much for Master Cecil ; at least, he had got an idiotic notion into his juvenile head that he was dreadfully in love with her. Before he went to Harrow he had regarded her much after the same uncomplimentary fashion as boys of that age are wont to regard girls—nuisances, stupids, tell-tale-tits ! But what with public-school life, an increase of stature, and above all, the development of the hairy nothings on cheek and upper lip, a change had come over him ; and their long rides and innumerable games of croquet together during the last midsummer holidays had quite overcome his youthful affections. It had indeed been a "Black Monday" when the day arrived for him to say good bye to Cousin Fanny, and betake himself back to Harrow. For four-and-twenty hours he was inconsolable, and seriously contemplated writing to the young lady, and making a clean breast of it. Indeed, he adopted such a wobegone but reckless air on his arrival at school that his tutor got quite seriously alarmed, and anxiously inquired "whether he was in pain ?" This was a finisher to Cecil, who gasped out a negative, and then slunk away to bed, disgusted with everybody, and more particularly with himself. I am in duty bound to add, that at the end of twenty-four hours Cousin Fanny was, if not altogether forgotten, at least less disturbing in her influence, and by the next half-holiday her juvenile adorer was himself again. Hayfork's information, however, as to her being again a visitor at the Grange had re-awakened him to the fact that she was a jolly girl, and imperceptibly he found himself drifting back into the old train of thoughts.

There was a large party at dinner that evening ; but Cecil, being the host's son and heir, and the latest arrival, engaged a very large share of attention. He had tried very hard to get a seat near his cousin ; but Captain Penton, a fine dashing-looking fellow, had taken her into the dining-room, and occupied the chair on one side of her, while on the other, a young Mr. Blakely, the son of one of Mr. Desmond's neighbours, was trying hard to make himself agreeable. Cecil was in despair, and felt himself much injured. What right, he asked himself, had this captain, with his long moustache, to go up to his cousin, and offer her his arm as a matter of course ? How he hated him, and wished he had got him in a scrimmage at football, to have a good peg at his shins ! And then afterwards, in the drawing-room, what business had he, immediately on entering, to stride across to the sofa on which she was sitting, and fling his big, clumsy body down beside her ? Above all, how could he dare to take her hand and lead her to the piano, when she had been asked to sing ; and then, the greatest insolence of all, assume to himself the privilege of turning over the leaves of her music for her, an agreeable duty that Cecil had always fancied peculiarly his own ? Our young gentleman looked on in a perspiration of indignation. Cousin Fanny had only spoken to him once in the course of the evening, and that was to observe "that he was so much grown she would hardly have known him."

She had rather a disagreeable habit of talking about his age, and calling him a boy, an indignity that he fiercely resented when offered by anybody else ; but none

are so blind as those who will not see, and what would have been offensive in others, was capital fun in Cousin Fanny. Howbeit, Cecil, when he retired to the privacy of his room that evening, felt a strong predisposition to call Captain Penton to account for the familiar tone he adopted towards Miss Fanny Vernon, and entertained very serious notions of coffee and pistols in the shrubbery. One thing, however, he was quite determined upon, and that was to write a letter to his cousin, and avow his passion. Generally speaking, when rash resolves of this description, or in fact of any kind, are formed, it is good to sleep upon them before taking any active steps to carry them into execution. Cecil did sleep on his, and soundly too ; but the next morning his mind was not in the slightest degree altered, and after breakfast he occupied himself till luncheon-time in the composition of the fatal epistle, which, after wasting nearly half a quire of his mother's best cream-laid note-paper, he managed to settle in the following terms :—

“ DARLING COUSIN FANNY,—I am afraid you will think me an awful young muff, but I cannot help it if you do. I would much rather have told you what I want to say, but the fact is, I am rather funky, and so I do hope you will forgive me. I say, you won't be angry, will you? only you have been so awfully jolly to me, and I could not help getting spooney. I hope that's spelt right, but I can't find the word in the guv'nor's dictionary, and so have had to make a shot at it. But I say, Cousin Fanny, it's no use, I can't keep it to myself any longer : I am in love with

you, and I write to tell you so, because I hope you are with me, and that you will write back to me and say you are. You are only four years and a half older than I am, and that isn't much, you know ; and if you could only wait for me till I am twenty-one, I know the guv'nor would do the liberal. Don't say no. I'll work awfully hard when I get back to Harrow. Don't tell anybody about this.

“Ever your most affectionate lover,
“CECIL.”

“There, that will do, I think,” said Cecil to himself, sealing the letter with an air of triumph, and putting it into his pocket. “I'll slip it quietly into her hand, the first time I get the chance.” This he managed to accomplish in the course of the evening, after dinner, and when he went to bed he slept like a top, quite satisfied with his day's work.

Meanwhile the “meet” that was to come off on the morrow had been the chief topic of conversation, and every horse in Mr. Desmond's stable, that was capable of being ridden to hounds, was placed under contribution. Not without much protest from Captain Penton, it was at length arranged that Fanny should ride an animal on whose vicious propensities Hayfork was never weary of dilating, by name Saucy Boy. He was a fine, powerful chestnut, the very picture of muscle and breeding, but he was blessed with one of the most uncertain tempers that ever attached to a member of the equine race.

“Nonsense! I'm not afraid of him,” said Fanny, with

a self-confident toss of her head. "I've ridden him often enough before now, and we were always the best of friends."

"But, Fanny, my love," ventured Mrs. Desmond, "it's a very different matter taking a quiet ride along the road, and going out with the hounds."

"Nonsense, auntie," replied the young lady; "Saucy Boy won't try any of his pranks with me, wherever he is."

After one or two further vain attempts to dissuade her from her intention, the endeavour was abandoned as hopeless, and orders were at last given in accordance with her wishes.

Cecil, who I have before said was a first-rate horseman, had not taken any part in the discussion; probably because, seeing that his cousin was not to be turned from her purpose, and knowing better than any one, except Hayfork, what sort of a customer Saucy Boy was to deal with, he felt that anything he might say would do more harm than good. He made up his mind, however, to turn out of bed the first thing in the morning, and give the horse a good hour's exercise, so as to quiet him down a little.

At seven o'clock the next morning he was in the stable-yard, waiting for Saucy Boy to be brought out, who presently appeared, led by Hayfork. Cecil saw in a moment that the brute was on mischief bent; his eyes were anything but encouraging, and his ears lay ominously back. But Cecil was never afraid of any horse in his life, and in a moment he had vaulted on to the animal's back, and had gathered the bridle into his hand with a firm grasp.

"Do be careful, Master Cecil," Hayfork shouted, as with many twists and turns Saucy Boy wriggled out of the yard; "use the curb as little as you can, for it makes him almost mad."

"All right, Hayfork," replied Cecil, perfectly at home in the saddle, and prepared to administer any correction that his Bucephalus might need. "I'll give him a lesson, if he comes any of his capers with me."

About a mile from the Grange there was a large common covered with furze and gorse, though affording ample space for a good gallop. Thither Cecil directed Saucy Boy, who, just because his rider wanted to go one way, immediately took it into his head to prefer an opposite direction. He was, however, somewhat astonished at the punishment his disobedience had brought down upon him, and was so completely taken aback that for a while he gave in. But when he got to Coggleton Common, and sniffed the stiff breeze that was blowing over the gorse and heather, his spirits and temper rose to fever-heat; he pulled at his bridle, shook his head, and tried to get the bit between his teeth; in short, he gave Cecil a pretty time of it.

"It really will never do for Cousin Fanny to ride this brute," said Cecil, half aloud; "he'd drag her arms off. Would you?" he added, addressing Saucy Boy, who had bent his head down till he had nearly got it between his forelegs. Then came a prolonged struggle for mastery. The horse plunged and kicked and reared, but all to no purpose; his rider was firm and immovable as if he had been glued into his saddle. The fight lasted some minutes; at length Cecil heard a snap, and before he had time to

see that one of the reins had parted, Saucy Boy had bolted with him, and was tearing along wildly over gorse and heather. In the blindness of his rage and fury he dashed along, regardless of all obstacles.

Even now Cecil was not frightened. Perfectly cool and collected, he calculated that if the horse would but keep straight on across the common, he would have no danger to apprehend. There was a good four miles before him, and such rough travelling would sooner bring the brute to his senses than anything else. The only thing to be feared was lest he should swerve to the right, which would carry them straight to a deep railway cutting and —death. There could be no other alternative, and Cecil required no one to tell him so. Saucy Boy, as if possessed by a demon, despite the most strenuous efforts to the contrary, gradually inclined his head in the very direction his rider so dreaded.

In the five minutes that followed, Cecil Desmond stood face to face with death! Two hundred yards in front rose a small fence, and just beyond that he could see the chasm towards which he was being hurried. It was an awful season, and in those few seconds, memories came trooping back, and he murmured out, "God have mercy upon me." He thought he would throw himself off, but resolved not to do that till every other hope was gone. On rushed the infuriated brute, and nearer and nearer came the destruction he knew not of. The fence was reached; sick and giddy, Cecil closed his eyes, his feet were out of the stirrups, and he was preparing to make a throw for life. There was a crash of wood, a sudden and violent check,

and he felt himself spinning in the air, and, thank God, bruised and shaken, but alive, a moment after, on mother earth. Well might he shudder with horror, when, opening his eyes and collecting his scattered senses, he found himself lying within two feet of the edge of the cutting, while Saucy Boy, with a broken leg, was vainly endeavouring to stand up. His rage and fury had ended, as man's passion often does, with self-damagement, and in less than an hour he would be put out of the misery he had brought upon himself by his own wild and wilful conduct. Cecil had not come off scathless; his right shoulder was put out, and was giving him great pain, while the terrible ordeal through which he had passed had thoroughly upset his nerves. He made his way home as best he could on foot.

As may be imagined, when he arrived everybody was in dismay and consternation; he was immediately carried upstairs, and laid on his bed, while Hayfork went off at full gallop for the doctor, who presently came, and put the dislocated joint back into its proper place, giving strict orders that the patient was to be kept perfectly quiet. Instead of meeting at the Grange, the hounds were taken to an adjoining farm, while Fanny abandoned all idea of going out with them. As she was passing by Cecil's room in the evening, on her way up to dress for dinner, she heard him call out to her to come and speak to him. His letter, which of course she had read, she had laughed at, as might have been expected; but she could not help feeling that she had had something to do with the accident that had befallen him with Saucy Boy; for Hayfork had

informed her "that Master Cecil had said he'd a precious deal rather have his neck broken, than that she should run any danger."

So she went in obedience to the call, and sitting down by the bed, took Cecil's hand in hers.

"I wanted to see you so much," he said. "I've been thinking about that silly note I wrote you. I hope you have burned it, for I have been thinking since I have been lying here, and I know what a stupid young idiot I have been. You're not angry, are you?"

"Angry, dear Cecil," she answered softly, "why should I be angry? We are all foolish sometimes. Why, do you know, I shall be getting quite an old woman when the time comes for you to think of such things as you wrote to me about. You must feel certain that I love you as my dear, dear brother, and always shall if you will let me, and I shall never forget as long as I live how you have run yourself into such danger for my sake: never, Cecil, my own dear brother, never."

And then she bent down and kissed him, and he felt more than one warm tear fall upon his face. His silly, boyish romance was at an end, and putting his uninjured arm round her neck, he murmured, "Ever my own darling sister Fanny."

As a sort of postscript, it is right to add, that two months after Cecil's accident and Saucy Boy's death, Miss Fanny Vernon became Mrs. Penton. She and her husband are always having Cecil to stay with them, and that young gentleman declares that the gallant Captain is the jolliest brick in Christendom.





“WITH THE TIDE.”

CHAPTER I.

HOMeward Bound.

SWIFTLY over the glittering waters of the estuary of the Thames, her sails bellied out by the favouring breeze, and lit up by the bright morning sun till their whiteness was almost dazzling, the brave ship *Gipsy Queen*, bound from Sydney to London, drew nearer and nearer to the end of her long and perilous journey. She had done her work well in weather foul and fair, and bore upon her sides the scars of more than one fierce conflict with storms in the tropics and squalls in the southern seas, that had made her stout framework shiver again and again, and threatened to send her and her living freight to the bottom. But all her trials and dangers were over now, she had parted company with the waves for a while, and in a few short hours more would be snugly ensconced in a cosy corner of the docks, there to enjoy a long and well-earned rest. So she

sped along over the sparkling waters till the banks on either side the river narrowed the way along which she was travelling. Soon a very dirty and noisy little steam-tug, making the blue sky black with its inky smoke, came panting alongside, and in a few minutes more the masts of the *Gipsy Queen* were bare of canvas, and her pigmy friend was towing her Londonwards to her destination.

It was pleasant to witness the general delight and excitement of all on board the Australian clipper ship. Most of her passengers had drawn their first breath in the old country, and their hearts yearned toward the land that gave them birth as they recognized her familiar features. Some few there were who were about to make her acquaintance for the first time, but the same feeling was at work within them, for all their nearest and dearest had called England mother, and so they loved her, though till now they had never seen her bright and bonny face.

Did I say that all on board the *Gipsy Queen* were glad and happy? Only a single exception! While those around her were laughing and chattering gaily at the prospect of a speedy termination of the voyage, and a release from their long imprisonment, and many were bright with the anticipation of meeting loved friends and relations not seen for years, one lonely, silent woman sat apart with her baby-boy in her arms, her face worn and weary-looking, and her eyes turned wistfully toward the sea, that now seemed but a silver streak on the horizon. She wore an expression altogether inconsistent with the general mirth and gaiety; and as she rocked herself backwards and forwards, moaning

sadly the while, it required no very great acuteness to perceive that there was some deep sorrow gnawing at her heart. She was young, of that there could be no doubt, though trouble had evidently done its worst to prematurely age her ; she was pretty, too, and her general appearance indicated gentle breeding and delicate nurture. What a contrast there was between the darkness and gloom on her face, and the smiles and dimples of which her baby's countenance seemed composed ! Now I know that it is always the fashion for every mother to declare that her own individual baby is the most beautiful, the dearest, the sweetest darling that ever found its way into the troublesome world. I am not a mother, and I am not going to trouble myself with comparisons, which, as the old saying most sensibly remarks, are odious ; but I have no hesitation whatever in asserting that that baby on board the *Gipsy Queen* was a perfect picture. His face was suffused with sunshine ; not that he never cried, babies who are in good health and alive to the responsibilities of their position ought to have a good pipe-opening roar occasionally, it is of immense benefit to their constitutions, and an incontrovertible sign of the soundness of their lungs. At the time we are making an inspection of my young gentleman, he was in the best of tempers ; stretched out full length on his mother's lap, and with his big blue eyes turned upwards, he was crowing and kicking in a manner that showed he was determined to attract and monopolize attention. But her thoughts were far away; back through storm and rain and mist, over the thousands of miles of green sea that the *Gipsy Queen* had

traversed, her mind wandered to the land she had left behind, and the terrible self-imposed mission from which she was now returning, that she had gone thither to fulfil. And then the irresistible hot tears forced their way out, and coursing unheeded down her pale cheeks fell upon the upturned face of the smiling youngster, till one big drop lighted on his eyelid, and nearly blinding him for a moment, changed in a single wink the whole aspect of his countenance. At his first cry his mother seemed roused from her abstraction, and pressing him to her bosom soothed him with soft words and tender caresses. And soon the summer storm was past, and the sunshine was as bright as ever !

Throughout the voyage it had been a mystery to the passengers by the *Gipsy Queen* who and what was this lonely, melancholy woman, who kept so entirely to herself, associating with no one, indeed, speaking to no one, except when it was impossible to avoid doing so. Her only companion was her baby, in whose society she spent all her time. More than once the captain, who was a rough, good-humoured fellow, and every inch of him a sailor, had tried hard to enter into conversation with her ; and on one occasion had gone into ecstacies over the baby, which device, as a man of much and varied experience, he held to be the right way to winning a mother's heart. But she met his advances with a coldness that repelled him, and when he proposed to take the young gentleman from her for a few moments to give him a "Here we go, up, up, up !" she only clutched the little fellow more tightly to her breast, while her eyes

illumined by a wild and passionate look, flashed out a negative.

"I'm bothered if I can make her out," said the disconcerted skipper to one of the passengers after this interview. "She's a regular sphinx, and there's no taking her bearings."

The clock of an adjacent church was striking six, and the gilded weathercock that surmounted the spire seemed almost a flame in the ruby-red rays of the expiring sun, when the *Gipsy Queen*, having successfully made her way under the auspices of the dirty little steam-tug up the river, at last came to a secure and comfortable resting-place. Some of her passengers had landed at Gravesend in order to save time, and those who remained till she was securely moored in the docks did not take very long to clear out, for they were only too glad to find themselves standing once again on *terra firma*. Passengers and crew had for the most part taken themselves off to their friends or to such places as their fancy led them, and the *Gipsy Queen* was almost deserted, when, as the shadows were lengthening and the twilight was drawing on, the lonely mother stole quietly ashore and hurried away, her baby in her arms, past the many store-houses, over the swing bridges, and finally out at the dock gates into the noisy, bustling streets of East London. She had left what little luggage she possessed behind her, purposing to send for it on the morrow, for a strange feeling possessed her that she could not sleep another night on board the ship; and though at first she sought to combat it she found it irresistible. And so

out into the busy thoroughfare, friendless, homeless, with care and anxiety gnawing at her heart, she made her way, while the baby, unconscious of the new world upon which he had entered, slept soundly under her shawl.

Connolly's Lodging House was a place well known and much frequented by sailors and other persons, whose wandering manner of life made it impossible and unnecessary for them to have a fixed residence anywhere. It stood, or rather tottered, in a dark and narrow street leading out of the Commercial Road, which was regarded with no great favour by the police, and on the outside presented anything but an inviting appearance. Its visage was begrimed and blackened with the soot of ages, and the upper part was prevented from falling forward by a strong beam that stretched across the street and rested on the opposite house. But for this precaution the top stories of each would have long before made one another's acquaintance in common ruin on the stones below.

Mrs. Connolly—her good man had gone to his rest these ten years—was a remarkable woman in every sense of the word. In stature and circumference she was proportioned in a way that would have made her an invaluable adjunct to a travelling caravan, while her voice was of so masculine a tone that it was difficult to believe that it could be associated with any person in the habit of wearing petticoats. I am sorry to have to add that whatever quantity of the milk of human kindness she had once possessed, it was now completely soured, and she regarded humanity generally as a thing to be bullied and cheated and ill-treated; at

least such portions of it as came under her notice and handling. Perhaps this was not altogether surprising, for in her time she had had some rough customers to deal with, and had on one occasion been laid up for nearly three months in consequence of a brutal assault made upon her by a Coolie seaman, who, after sleeping at her lodging-house for upwards of a week, refused to pay her for the accommodation, which conduct naturally enough she resented. Her establishment was divided into two compartments, one for men and the other for women and children. And thither, as the night drew on, the poor and homeless came hurrying, till every bed was full, and the atmosphere of the ill-built, ill-ventilated wards, became suffocating and almost pestilential, Ah ! my young people, you in your own cosy little rooms all to yourselves, with everything about you clean and white and sweet smelling, do not know the filth and grime and sickly odours in which so many of your fellow-creatures have to sleep, where to breathe is to inhale poison, and the dreams are of fever and death !

It was getting dark, and Mrs. Connolly was standing at what she was pleased to term her front door, awaiting the arrival of candidates for accommodation in her house, when she was startled by a hand being placed upon her arm ; and looking up she found a young and decently dressed woman standing at her side with a baby in her arms. It was the lonely mother we met on board the *Gypsy Queen*.

“ What on earth do you want, making people jump in that way ? ” growled Mrs. Connolly, looking very red.

"Why couldn't you speak instead of catching hold of one?"

"I am very sorry to have startled you," was the answer, given in a soft and musical voice, "but I want to know if I can have a bedroom here to-night?"

"A bedroom!" roared the lodging-house keeper, with a grim smile on her face; "well, I'm blessed! Would you like a parlour and a boudoir as well? A bedroom, indeed! I don't keep bedrooms; but if you want somewhere to sleep there's the women's ward, where you can have half a nice comfortable bed for twopence for the night. A bedroom, indeed!" And with that Mrs. Connolly went into a violent fit of laughter, till her cheeks got purple, and she was almost choked with the cough it had induced. At last she was brought to her senses by being addressed in a style to which she was little accustomed.

"Listen to me, woman," said the stranger: "I want none of your coarse wit. If you have a bed in a separate room to let I will take it and pay you for it, but as to my sleeping in a ward with my baby and sharing a bed with one of your female lodgers, I would sooner wander about the streets till morning."

Mrs. Connolly was dumb-founded; she, who was always treated with the most profound respect, to be addressed as "woman," it was simply awful. But as often happens with persons who are in the habit of carrying things with a high hand and lording it over their fellow-creatures, she was completely mastered by the bold and authoritative style in which she had been

met. She could not help respecting the woman who had vanquished her in a moment, and when she did speak her own tone was much subdued.

"Well, now I come to think of it," she said, "there is the attic you might have. It's rather high up, and the ceiling's a trifle low, but we can soon set it a bit square and comfortable. Will that suit?"

"I have no doubt it will do well enough," was the answer. "It matters little what sort of a room it is, so long as I have it to myself. Show me to it," she added, impatiently, "for I am tired."

"My visitors always pays first," suggested Mrs. Connolly, holding out her hand; "it's so much better, you know, for them, we ain't under no obligations to one another."

"Enough!" was the reply, and the sum having been named was at once placed in her outstretched palm.

And then up the creaking, rickety stairs, that groaned and shook ominously beneath their feet, Mrs. Connolly led the way, followed by the stranger woman and her baby. At last the attic was reached, and entered after some difficulty in opening the door, and the lodger found herself in a room, the ceiling of which was about a couple of inches above her head, while by stretching out both her arms she could touch either wall. The furniture consisted of a chair with the seat almost entirely gone, and a small bed, which the maker must have intended for a person of very diminutive stature. But she seemed to heed none of the disadvantages, for, taking the candlestick from Mrs. Connolly's hand, she abruptly

wished her "Good night!" and that worthy, understanding the hint, disappeared downstairs, and had soon resumed her position on the doorstep below.

Meanwhile the lonely woman had seated herself on the edge of the bed, and unfastening her shawl disclosed the placid face of her sleeping baby; and as she looked down upon him, she thought what she would give to rest thus peacefully. My dear young people, that baby is my hero, and it is his story I am going to tell. So regard him well now at the beginning of his voyage; ere I shall have done with him there will have been many an ebb and flow in the river of his fortunes, that perchance may recall the time when thus sleeping on his mother's bosom he was in blissful ignorance of the future and what it would bring forth! Still, his eyes are closed and he sleeps on soundly, while she presses him nearer to her heart and kisses him fondly! Not till long years are passed will he know what her love and devotion to him has been! Never more will he see that gentle face so soft and kind to him, or be met by her tender, winning glances that had so often in a moment soothed and quieted his baby sorrows! No, still he slumbers, while slowly but surely inexorable fate weaves a veil, that when he wakes will have hidden her from his view for ever in this world!

Morning was breaking, and the stars were making their last feeble twinkles, when the policeman on duty in passing Connolly's Lodging House was startled to see smoke issuing from the window of one of the lower rooms of that establishment. In an instant more he had



"As she looked down upon him she thought what she would give to rest thus peacefully."

satisfied himself that the place was on fire, and at once raised an alarm. Soon the street was in an uproar, windows were thrown up, and pale and frightened faces peered out of them, while the greedy flames that had now burst forth in all their fury danced higher and higher, catching the woodwork and spreading further and further. Helter-skelter, racing for life, half-naked and wild with terror, Mrs. Connolly's lodgers tumbled out of their frowsy beds, and fighting madly with one another most of them managed to squeeze themselves through the narrow passage into the street. As for the landlady herself, she had taken flight at the first alarm, and in the airiest of costumes was standing in the gutter weeping and wringing her hands as she watched the destruction of her house.

There is a loud hurrah in the street. See, here comes the engine, the smoking horses galloping at the top of their speed as if conscious of their errand. Then, in a shorter time than it takes to write, the hose is fixed, and the demon, Fire, has to grapple with his enemy, Water ! But he will have the best of the battle to-night, he has had too long a start in the race, and a second deluge could scarce quench him till he has burned himself out.

The chief fireman was a fine specimen of an Englishman, broad-shouldered, open-countenanced, with an eye that bespoke determination and courage in the heart. He had before now done many a noble deed of daring amidst the flames, and was always ready to risk his own life to save that of a fellow-creature.

“Are all the people out?” he shouted, but everybody

was in such a state of terror that no answer followed. Then, almost before the echo of his voice had ceased, a wild shriek was heard, and immediately after a woman's face, ghastly and distorted in the agony of her situation, appeared at one of the top windows of the burning house.

"Save my child!" she screamed; "I care not what comes to me, only save him!"

Higher and higher darted the tongues of flame, ruddier and ruddier grew the glare in the clear morning sky. Could it be that men would stand by and see a helpless woman and her babe swept into eternity without extending a hand to save them? No, never should that be said, at least so far as Sam Hill the fireman was concerned. It was no time for reflection or balancing probabilities, every second was precious, and he knew that he was not only jeopardising his own life, but his chance of rescuing those in danger by delay. He uttered no word, but before the horrified crowd had recovered from the terrible sight he was battling his way through scorching flames and suffocating smoke up the stairs that yielded beneath his feet. He never paused to think; had he done so, Sam could scarcely have felt otherwise than that he was a doomed man, and that he would never set his eyes on his own little blind daughter at home again. But a merciful Providence, on occasions of this sort, endows the heart with such a noble purpose that everything is forgotten save the one object in view. Half-choked and blinded, guided by the mother's screams, he struggled on till he reached the attic-door. For one

moment he turned to look behind him, and as he did so the stairs over which he had just passed fell with a dreadful crash, cutting off the only means of escape. But Sam Hill neither changed colour nor paused ; he always carried with him an unswerving belief and confidence in the love and mercy of the Omnipotent, and he was as cool and collected as ever. He found the mother and her baby in the room, the former exhausted and fainting, the latter screaming and shrieking. I am sorry to have to record that on so trying an occasion my young gentleman was so exceedingly weak as to cry ; but considering his age, and one thing and another, perhaps it was not altogether surprising ! At the sight of Sam Hill the woman seemed for a moment to revive. Staggering across towards him, she put her baby into his arms.

“ Begone !” she whispered hoarsely, and in a strangely altered voice, “ or it will be too late. See, it is close upon us !” she continued, pointing with her finger through the open door, where the flames were already mingling with the thick smoke. “ Save my baby-boy, and the good God will bless you and yours !” and then, falling at his feet, her hands stretched out imploringly, she murmured something he could not hear, and sank fainting on the floor. Another awful crash below, and Sam Hill felt the floor rocking beneath him. There was no time to be lost, he rushed to the window and looked out. He could hear the roar of voices below, and the hissing of the water as it fell upon the fire, but saw no means of escape. Suddenly his eye lighted on the beam

that stretched across the street, supporting the upper stories of the two houses as has been described. It was, after all, but a foot beneath the window-ledge, and he thought he could reach it safely. Perilous though this alternative was, it seemed pleasant in comparison with the fate that awaited him if he remained. He turned to look if the woman was still unconscious. She was kneeling at his side again. "Save my baby-boy!" she shouted. "Leave me here, but save him!"

It was a terrible occasion for Sam. He could not bear to leave her behind, but he felt that his first effort must be to rescue the little one in his arms, whose helpless cries wrung his heart. Catching up the sheet from the bed, he folded the baby up in it, and then slung the strange bundle round his neck. In a moment more he was clinging on to the window-ledge, his legs swinging to and fro in search of the beam. He could not touch it; it was just a trifle too far beneath him, and there he hung almost by his nails, with the vision of a terrible death before him. One last effort must be made; he turned his eyes downward and saw that what he sought was scarce half-a-dozen inches below him. Why, after all, if he let go of the window-ledge he could catch hold of the beam as he dropped; there was no great difficulty in that, only if he should miss catching hold of it! Only and if—those two words he never waited to think about, but, like a hero as he was, made a bold strike for life—and won!

Over the slender bridge he made his way with his burden on his back, and when he reached the other side

friendly arms were outstretched to receive him and drag him into safety. And then overtaxed nature gave way, and, as one of his mates loosed the living bundle from around his neck, Sam Hill dropped in a swoon!

And that lonely, melancholy woman, who came to England by the *Gipsy Queen*, slept the sleep that knows no waking beneath the smouldering embers of what had once been Connolly's Lodging House.





CHAPTER II.

BLIND JANET.

“**S**WONDER what keeps your father so late this morning, Jenny!” exclaimed Miss Sarah Hill, better known among her friends and acquaintance as Aunt Sally, as she busied herself in the preparation of some tempting-looking buttered toast in the little parlour of Sam Hill’s house, on the morning when the events recorded in the latter part of the last chapter occurred. “It’s an uncommon thing for him to be behind-hand in coming to breakfast,” she continued. “It’s pretty sure there’s been a fire somewhere during the night.”

The speaker was a bustling, smart-looking woman, who jerked out her words with extraordinary emphasis, and seemed anxious to say all she had to say with the least possible waste of time. But with all her briskness, nay, it might almost be called roughness of manner, Aunt Sally had a big and tender heart; and when her brother’s wife died some three years before the time

when we made her acquaintance, she had, without a murmur, left a comfortable situation as housekeeper at a large warehouse in the city, at his invitation, to come and look after his cottage and take care of his little blind daughter.

It had been a grievous blow to Sam, when, after long hope deferred, he had been assured by the most competent authorities that his darling child, Janet, was irretrievably blind, and that those bright brown eyes that appeared so full of life and intelligence to him were powerless and dead. At first he could not believe what the doctors told him, and, seating her on his knee, would gaze long and earnestly into the little one's unappreciative orbs, waiting anxiously but confidently for some sign in them that she could see him. But as time passed on the irresistible truth dawned on him ; the doctors must be right, and he could do nought but bear with patience the dispensation of Providence.

As for Janet herself she was perfectly contented and happy, and strangers who saw her often went away quite ignorant of the terrible calamity under which she laboured. Her face was always wreathed in smiles, her laugh silvery and hearty, while she was singing about the place from morning till night, carrying an atmosphere of contentment and gaiety into every corner of the cottage. A more lovely child nature never formed ; it almost seemed as if it had sought to make up for the one fearful deficiency in its work by gifting her with a beauty of form and feature as near perfection as could be. Look at her as she sits by the open window ; for though the

limited size of Sam's cottage requires that the cookery be done in the parlour, it is a warm summer's morning. What painter would not rush off for his tools to perpetuate such a living picture! She can only number nine years, and yet she appears as if she had lived almost twice that period, so marked and striking is the chiselling of her face. At this moment there is something troubling her, she is neither smiling nor singing, but her eyes are sad; and as Aunt Sally addresses her in the words that have been recorded, she sighs and makes no reply. Janet's love for her father was so intense, that when he was away from her side beyond the customary period entailed by his duty, she became quite melancholy, and would sit silent and gloomy till he came home, when his entrance would bring back the fine weather and set her all right again.

"I can hear him!" she exclaimed, jumping up suddenly from her seat by the window and hurrying to the door to let her father in, while Aunt Sally took occasion to look out at Sam, who was standing on the step, and to commence a remonstrance with him for being so late.

"Lawk a mercy! whatever is that bundle you've got in your arms?" she called to him, observing that he was carrying something that looked soft and bulky. "I hope you ain't been picking up a bargain anywhere," she added, remembering sundry occasions on which Sam had been most terribly taken in by designing persons who had cheap lots for sale.

"Just you keep your curiosity to yourself, Sally," was Sam's answer from the outside, and the next moment he

made his appearance in the parlour, followed by Janet, and continued : "It ain't a bargain exactly as I've been picking up, but it's something valuable that I'm going to make a present of to you and Jenny."

By this time Aunt Sally's curiosity was too much for her, and so she put down the teapot she was just about to fill at the kettle, and crossed to where Sam was standing, his mouth twitching with fun.

"Come, Sam, let's see it !" she said, making a dart at the bundle ; but he was too sharp for her, and jumped out of the way.

"Oh, do tell us what it is, father !" chimed in Janet, still holding fast by Sam's coat tails.

Now, how long these two would have been kept in suspense it is impossible to say, but at that instant there was a sudden and most incomprehensible movement in the bundle, which was immediately followed by a strange sound proceeding from it that bore a remarkable resemblance to a baby's cry.

"I do believe it's a sucking pig," jerked out Aunt Sally, all in a hurry.

"It's a baby, I'm sure," said Janet, clapping her hands ; and the sageness of her guess was vindicated by a further and more prolonged agitation in the bundle, accompanied by strains, the nature of which there was no further room to doubt.

"Well, Sam, and what does all this mean ?" inquired Aunt Sally in a great flurry, partly at having made an absurd mistake, and next at the singularity of the situation. "What new foolery have you been up to?"

"It means, Sally," replied Sam, tears standing in his brave old eyes, and his voice quivering as he laid back the shawl and disclosed the little one whom he had rescued from death, "that, by God's mercy, I have been able to save this tiny mite from being burned up like his poor mother. He and I have been as nigh the grave as man and baby ever was before, without being took into it ; and there's a something in my heart that says to me, 'Sam Hill, as long as you're this side the green grass, and have got a bit or a sup, that poor little orphan shouldn't know what it is to want.' And, Sally, that's what I mean ; and when I've told you all about it you'll say I'm right."

With that Sam took his chair at the table, and told them of his battle with the flames, and how slight a thing had saved him. And meanwhile Janet had crept to his side, and, gently drawing his baby from his arms, took the little fellow into her own, and, sitting down on a hassock at her father's side, hushed his cries and restored the smiles and dimples once again. And, by-and-by, as Sam progressed with his story, she passed her hand over the baby's face gently, for thus it was that she could alone appreciate the human face divine in her terrible darkness. And he, with his big blue eyes, looked up into hers with wonder and astonishment, nor offered the slightest objection to her strange way of taking his likeness. On the contrary, he stretched out his arms to her, and laughed and crowed till Sam was compelled to bring his talking to a conclusion suddenly ; and as he saw Janet a soft look stole over his face, and he put his big horny fist upon her head and blessed her.

"Well, Sam," said Aunt Sally, greatly mollified and overcome by the sad fate of the poor, lonely mother, "a baby ain't altogether the most convenient thing to have about a place. But you're right, I dare say, and I'll do my best to bring this 'ere bundle up well and hearty."

"God bless you, Sal," said Sam; "there ain't a woman in the world as has got such a big heart as you have. It takes very little to make it swell and swell till one almost expects it would burst."

"And if you please, Aunt Sally," chimed in Janet, "I may be nurse; mayn't I? I'm quite sure I can always keep him quiet and good. Why, he has not cried since I took him from father!"

Who says there are not good Samaritans in this world to succour those who have fallen into rough places? I would ask any one who entertains such an opinion to step into Sam Hill's parlour and take stock of those three charitable Christians, who, in their own comfort with a roof over their heads and food upon their table, have remembered how One above is a Father to the fatherless, and have registered a silent vow to protect and watch over the motherless bairn.

"Did the poor woman who was burned, father," inquired Janet, "tell you what the baby's name was?"

"No, my girl," replied Sam, "there was no time to be wasted in asking names or telling them. I know no more than you who she was or where she hailed from; and though I made inquiries of Mrs. Connolly and the other folks who was a lodging in the burnt house, they

couldn't give me any information. All Mrs. Connolly said was, that last night the strange woman came with this baby in her arms and asked for a bed in a room by herself. And that's all; she'd never seen her before, and didn't even know which end of the street she came from."

"Then what are we to call him?" persevered Janet, for she was determined that our hero should be christened then and there. "Now, Aunt Sally, do give him a name!"

"Me, my dear!" exclaimed the worthy lady addressed, "I've no time to think about giving people names. You can do that."

"Yes, Jenny, you shall be his godmother, and give him his name," added Sam, patting his little daughter lovingly on the head; "and won't he just be proud of you when he grows up?"

Janet was quite silent for a few minutes, as if engaged in deep thought; then her eye brightened and she burst out with, "Well, father, I think I've got one that will do. Of course his surname must be Hill, because he belongs to us, and his other shall be Oliver, after Uncle Oliver. Oh, won't he be surprised when he comes home from the next voyage to find that he has got a namesake?" And Janet laughed her silvery laugh, Aunt Sally smiled pleasantly, Sam nodded his head approvingly, and thus it was that he who hereafter will be known as Oliver Hill was christened. As for the baby himself, he crowed louder than ever, while Janet bent over his face, and, kissing him, whispered under her breath, "Please God bless my little brother!"



CHAPTER III.

“SOME SEVEN YEARS.”

HERE is one privilege, if so it can be called, that the story-teller possesses, which is, that he may do just as he likes with Father Time, and go backwards or forwards any number of years, just as it happens to suit his convenience. Centuries are as nothing ; he may revert to the days when Richard Cœur de Lion did terrible and cruel work among his Jewish subjects, though, by the way, there was not much of the lion-heart about his persecutions of these same helpless people ; or he may leap into the future without heeding the length of his jump. It is all for the best, however, that he should be able so to do, otherwise he would often be driven to chronicle a great many incidents about his characters anything but striking or interesting.

I have no doubt that Oliver Hill was a most wonderful baby in his way, and that, besides being very prepossessing in appearance, he was more intelligent, more observant, in fact, the most astoundingly clever young

gentleman for his age that ever sucked a thumb, or disturbed a household in the middle of the night with his cries. At the same time, in the earlier portion of his career he did not accomplish anything very remarkable, beyond scalding himself by trying the effect of an *impromptu* warm bath in the fish-kettle when it was full of boiling water; and, on another occasion, nearly amputating his thumb and forefinger by playing with the suet-chopper, which Aunt Sally had accidentally left in his way. These two important events, varied by periodical bumps and tumbles, unceasing care and attention from Janet, and decided over-feeding on Aunt Sally's part, not omitting daily cockhorse rides to Banbury Cross on Sam's knee, made up the principal items of Master Oliver's baby existence. He certainly had everything his own way; and, though he scarcely seemed to appreciate the importance of his position in the cottage, no despot ever exercised a more arbitrary rule over his subjects than did he over its inmates. Aunt Sally was always devising some new piece of finery for him; Janet never seemed tired of playing with him; Sam was perpetually locking up sixpences to pay for his schooling by-and-by; and Dash—ah, that reminds me I have forgotten to introduce that most distinguished character. So now, to atone for my error—"Mr. Reader—Mr. Dash; Mr. Dash—Mr. Reader."

Dash was a descendant in a direct line of that very old and time-honoured family called Terrier, who had existed since I do not know when, and who have always been held in the very highest estimation. His ap-

pearance was thoroughly in keeping with his name, and, what with the sharpness of his nose, the perkiness of his ears, and the curl of his tail, he was a canine dandy of the first water. When Oliver was first introduced into Sam's establishment, Dash much resented what he sagely anticipated would withdraw a very considerable share of attention from him, and retired to soothe his wounded feelings in the back yard, whence he refused to be coaxed for nearly a week. At the end of that time he thought better of it and returned to the parlour, where, for a little while longer, he sulked in a corner. But Janet would not allow this exhibition of temper, and catching him up in her arms she gave him a good scolding, and then setting him on a chair beside her, and holding Oliver on her knee, she made them known to one another; and, though Dash at first turned his head away and would not look agreeable, he slowly allowed his better feelings to obtain the upper hand, and it was not very long before he and the baby would romp under the table together, to Janet's intense delight and Aunt Sally's terror, lest "the child" should run a pin or needle into himself. As Dash and Oliver got better acquainted, and at the same time grew older, it was one of the funniest things in the world to see the tricks the former was taught by his friend; in fact, as Sam often used to remark, "he believed that dog could do everything but speak."

And thus, loved and cherished almost as tenderly as if his mother had lived to watch over him, Oliver the baby grew and grew, till, on one eventful day, Aunt Sally announced her intention of investing him with the

distinguished Order of Knickerbockers, and forthwith proceeded to carry her plan into execution, despite the strenuous opposition of the young gentleman operated on, who had a decided objection to the stockings scrubbing his legs. He managed, however, to survive the infliction, and was not very long in learning to appreciate the advantages of his newly-acquired dignity.

One winter's evening, when the snow was falling heavily outside, and Sam, on duty at his station, heartily wished himself in his own cosy little room at home, Aunt Sally and Janet were sitting over the fire in the parlour of the cottage, the former vigorously knitting a pair of warm socks for her brother, while the latter was doing duty as a pillow to Oliver, who, resting on a stool at her feet, had laid his head in her lap, and was sleeping soundly.

"Auntie," said Janet, after a long period of silence speaking softly lest she should disturb him, "do you think we shall ever know where Oliver came from, and what his real name was?"

"I'm certain sure we shan't, my dear," was the answer. "Your father has done all he can, and more than he ought for the matter of that. Money's scarce enough, goodness knows, let alone wasting it putting advertisements in newspapers on the chance of people seeing them as is dead and gone long ago."

"But how do you know that, Aunt Sally?" ventured Janet, timidly, for they had discussed the same point before now, and her aunt had more than once expressed very strong opinions upon it.

"Listen to me, Jenny," replied that worthy but positive lady, laying down her work for a moment, "I'm not going to say anything more on the subject, or else I very likely shall get angry;" and then, by way of immediately contradicting her own assertion, she went on—"All I know is, that if there's anybody a living as that child belongs to, my name isn't Sarah."

It was no use, Janet felt, and so she relapsed into silence once more, and, closing her eyes, wandered away with her own thoughts till she seemed as if she were in a new world, with strange faces around her. Only Oliver was with her, holding her hand in his, and he led her past the shadowy forms about her, and looked wistfully up into their dim faces; and then, just as he seemed on the point of recognizing one of them, it faded away and was lost to her.

"Jenny," said Aunt Sally after another long silence, giving a finishing twist with her knitting-needles to one of the socks she was at work upon, "that child wants another pair of knickerbockers; it will never do for him to be running about in those he's got on. He'll have nothing fit to be seen in of a Sundays."

Jenny, startled from her reverie, was back in a twinkling from the land of fancies in which she had been wandering to the cheerful fire and Aunt Sally's brisk voice. The visions that seemed floating before her vanished like as with the touch of a magician's wand, and she awoke as if from a pleasant dream.

"There's that old frock of his," continued Aunt Sally—who never thought anything ought to be done

without proceeding to do it on the moment, and who had already jumped up from her chair and was busy turning over the contents of a cupboard in one corner of the parlour—"he wore when he was first brought here, he scarcely ever had it on his back after, and I think I could cut that up so as to make a pair of knickerbockers out of it for him to wear on week-days. Here it is," she added, dragging out the before-mentioned garment, which certainly looked considerably the worse for wear, and scarcely seemed likely to afford sufficient material for the purpose to which it was about to be devoted. But Aunt Sally could accomplish the most wonderful feats with her needle, and, in a few seconds more, she had laid the frock out on the table, and was unpicking the stitches—those stitches over which a dear, dead hand had once so fondly laboured. Snip, snip went the scissors, till this part of the work was nearly accomplished, when Janet, who was again relapsing into her dreamy state, was startled by an exclamation from her aunt.

"Mercy on us, Janny!" she jerked out, "if here isn't a small piece of paper, with some writing on it, sewed up in the hem of the skirt. Depend upon it, it will tell us something more than we think for. Where are my glasses?" she continued, putting her hand into her pocket, and turning its contents out on to the table. But her spectacles were not there; and, as was usually the case, it took her some minutes to find them. And meanwhile Janet sat silent and sad, for her heart was troubled, and a fear was within her, that had often before

disturbed her, that some one would come at last to claim Oliver, and take him away.

At last Aunt Sally found her eyes, as she generally called her spectacles, and, adjusting them, unrolled the thin scrap of paper. Her hands trembled as she did so, and, for once in her life, she felt nervous. Though she would have denied it had any one charged her with it, there was in her heart an echo of Janet's fear. The writing before her was of a scrawling, illegible character, indeed, towards the end some of the words were so indistinct that she had the greatest difficulty to make them out. There was no date or address at the top ; in fact, it ran thus :—

“I, George Blundell, with my dying breath, wish to make reparation for a wicked wrong I have committed. In the presence of his wife, and in writing upon this paper, I solemnly declare that Arthur Mordaunt is innocent of the robbery he was supposed to have committed, and that it was I, and I alone, who stole the money from Messrs. Robson's cash-box eighteen months ago. May God forgive me the cruel wrong I have done him ! I can write no more, lest I have no power left me to sign this.—GEORGE BLUNDELL.”

Stumbling and blundering through this as she best could, Aunt Sally at length got to the end of it. For once she was startled in spite of herself, and her hand trembled visibly as she folded the paper up and took off her spectacles.

“Auntie,” said Janet, softly, “perhaps the Arthur Mordaunt whose name you read is Oliver's father.”

"I shouldn't wonder, my dear," replied Aunt Sally, dreamily; and then, after a pause, she added, as if speaking to herself, "That man must be found—he must be found!"

Janet said nothing more, but soon again she was wandering away into the land of fancies, and the shadowy forms rose again before her, and seemed to assume shapes that were familiar to her. But ever at her side was Oliver, holding her hand in his, so tightly grasped that it seemed as if it were in a vice, and thus for a while she forgot the darkness that hid the bright sky, the green trees, and, above all, the faces of those she loved from her, and lived in a world that was all her own.

Just as Oliver woke Sam came in at the door, and the child immediately ran towards him crying, "Dear daddie." As Sam took him up in his arms and kissed him, Aunt Sally thought of the paper, and what was written on it, and then a great crystal drop glistened on her cheek, and she turned away to busy herself in the preparation of supper, for her eyes were full of tears. Thus it was that they lighted on the first footprint of the track that henceforth was to be followed on and traced till the mystery should be cleared up, and the lost found.



CHAPTER IV.

BLACK MONDAY.

EIGHT years have passed since the day when Sam brought Oliver to his home. From knickerbockers he has been promoted to trousers, into the pockets of which he seizes every available opportunity to thrust his hands. He is a bright, sturdy boy, with a clear, honest eye that engenders confidence, and is quite as precocious as is desirable for his ten years. And Janet has grown quite a big girl, while the loveliness of her face seems to increase the older she gets. Though she cannot fondle or nurse Oliver as in the early times, they are inseparable, and never seem so happy as in one another's society. As for Aunt Sally, the lines on her face have sunk deeper, and she laughingly complains that she soon will be as grey as the neighbour's cat, but she is as brisk and active as ever, and still is woman-of-all-work in Sam's cottage. He in his turn appears little if at all altered, and is cheery and contented. That piece of paper which Aunt Sally found

sewn up in the old frock had for a short time caused him much worry and discomfort ; he felt that he was in duty bound to make all the search he could to discover the person to whom it was obviously of such vital importance. He spent far more than he had any right to in putting fresh advertisements in the paper, calling upon the said "Arthur Mordaunt to apply to him, and he would hear something to his advantage." But all to no purpose ; three or four people did answer him, and called to see him, but when they had spoken half-a-dozen sentences he felt satisfied that the person he sought was as far off as ever. So, after having made himself thoroughly restless and uncomfortable for six months, he abandoned his search, and carefully stowing away the piece of paper in an old desk, tried his best to forget all about it. As for Oliver, he did not know that it was in existence, and grew up to regard Sam and Janet as his father and sister in the fullest sense of the term. As to Aunt Sally he never could quite comprehend what position she held towards him, for she always kept him in a state of wholesome subjection, and, though spoiling him terribly, managed to do so without destroying her authority over him.

One fine summer's morning the family party at the cottage were sitting at breakfast. Sam, who had been very quiet all the previous evening, and during the early part of the meal had not spoken a word, appearing to have something on his mind, suddenly put down his knife and fork, and delivered himself to the following effect :—

"Olley, boy, you must go to school. It ain't because I don't like to see you playing about all day, but learning's the beginning of greatness, and I hopes afore I die to see you a doing well for yourself."

"That's right, Sam," said Aunt Sally, interrupting the flow of her brother's eloquence, for he spoke as fast as he could in order to conceal his emotion. "It's the most sensiblest thing you've said for ever so long. That child, if he don't soon be taught something, will grow up the ignorantest young monkey as ever was." And then, as if thoroughly satisfied with the elegance of her own grammar, she resumed her breakfast.

"But, daddie," pleaded Oliver, with a very disconsolate countenance, and a side look at Janet, who had grown very serious all of a sudden, "you're not going to send me altogether away from you, are you?"

"Not as I knows on, lad," replied Sam. "I've been a looking about here and there, and I think as I've hit upon the very place to suit. And that," he continued, seeing the anxious look on the child's face, "ain't a hundred miles away."

"A hundred miles!" exclaimed Oliver, misunderstanding him, and imagining that he was going to be sent to Kamschatka or Botany Bay at once. "Oh, Jenny, whatever shall I do all that long way off?" he addled, throwing his arms round Janet's neck.

"What do you want to be a teasing the child for?" snapped out Aunt Sally.

And then the due explanation was given, and it turned out that Sam had already made arrangements for

Oliver's daily attendance at a classical and commercial academy, in a street some short distance from the cottage, kept by one Theophilus Rhomboid, where he was to learn everything, from geometry down to simple addition, and from the Latin "Delectus" up to the most profound of all the writers of that language who had ever been discovered to puzzle the schoolboy brain. Oliver was far from being elated at the prospect of having his mind cultivated and improved ; on the contrary, he felt strongly inclined to make a show of opposition, but when he looked into Sam's face, remembering how kind and good he had always been to him, young though he was, his conscience smote him, and the gloom that had for a moment settled on his face fled away.

"Come here, lad," said Sam, stretching out his great brawny arms, and Oliver ran to him, and was clasped to his heart. "You'll try your best to learn, won't you, Olley ? and some day, when I'm dead and gone, and you've grown to be a man, you'll know that I was right in sending you to school."

The boy answered not, but he laid his head against Sam's broad chest, and, looking up into his brave, gentle eyes, answered with a look that only the young can give !

Just a word or two of Mr. Theophilus Rhomboid, who was a gentleman with a very long tongue, and a very short temper. According to his own account of himself, always given with a great assumption of modesty and interspersed at frequent intervals with the observation, "Don't suppose for one moment that I am saying

this from any self-conceit," he was perfectly at home with every Greek and Latin author, and could translate any passage in either language without the least assistance from dictionary or lexicon. All the ologies, and onomasties, and otamies, were stowed away in his capacious brain ; theology, astronomy, and botany were childplay to him, and he never read anything lighter than *Æschylus* or *Terence* (so he said !) The fact was, he had been in the habit of having a number of little boys under his thumb for so long that he began seriously to regard himself as a person of very great importance, without whom it was hardly possible that the world could go on. The amount of talking he must have gone through in the course of a day, in that dark, dreary schoolroom of his, would have driven an ordinary man out of his mind. But Mr. Rhomboid was not an ordinary man ; he had birched the elements of a sound classical and commercial education into so many juvenile mortals, that he had every reason to regard himself as something considerably out of the common, and was not quite sure whether Her Majesty the Queen would not appear some fine morning in Twig Street, and invest him on his own doorstep with the honour of knighthood for the incalculable benefits he had conferred upon society. Theophilus Rhomboid was, like many other people who entertain a high opinion of themselves, remarkably small in person ; he always dressed in the seediest black, and wore a white necktie with a gigantic bow, which, by some strange fatality, would always get under either one or other of his ears. The most remarkable feature about

him was his hands, which were always unpleasantly dirty, and suggested a gardener's existence rather than that of a schoolmaster; indeed, it had been insinuated more than once that he was afraid to wash them for fear of catching cold. But there is no time to put further finishing touches to his portrait ; he had his faults, and they unfortunately considerably outweighed his virtues.

On the first day of the half-year Oliver duly appeared, and took his place among Mr. Theophilus Rhomboid's pupils ; being escorted to the door of that worthy's house in Twig Street by Sam and Janet, the former of whom was continually reminding him to keep his spirits up, and hold his own against any boy of his own size ; and the previous evening had given him a lengthy lesson in the noble art of self-defence. Mr. Rhomboid was not in the best of humours that morning, and when Oliver entered at the door, he shrieked out at him in a voice closely resembling a nutmeg-grater at work—

“ Come here, little boy ; why weren't you here before ? You ought to have been here an hour ago. Punctuality is the secret of all success, and little boys who are late for school will never get on in the world. Therefore it is my painful duty, in order to impress upon you the truth of this golden rule, to punish you at once and on the spot. You must stand upon that form in front of my desk for half an hour, and at the same time occupy yourself in learning this page of spelling. Ascend into the place of disgrace,” continued the pedagogue, seizing Oliver by the arm, and compelling him to mount up on the form.

And thus it was that our hero was publicly introduced to his schoolfellows.



CHAPTER V.

THE TOILERS OF THE CITY.

BARNSLADE, in Loomshire, was, at the time of this history, making rapid way towards gaining that position of wealth and importance, that during later years it has occupied among the provincial towns of the United Kingdom. Situated in the very heart of a thickly-populated manufacturing district, it grew daily in bricks and mortar, and was in every respect adapted to become the head quarters of the commercial industry and enterprise of the locality. One by one huge factories had sprung up in and about it, raising to the skies their giant chimneys, whence issued clouds of thick black smoke, that curled and whirled upwards till meeting in mid air they combined, and often hanging over the busy city beneath like a pall, dulled the brightness of the sun, and hid the blue heavens from the view of the weary workers within its walls. For earning bread there was no child's play; but hard, unceasing toil from morning till night; bent backs, aching eyes, fingers

cramped and numbed, legs stiff and deadened by moving with the same monotonous action hour after hour ; such were some of the pleasant signs that marked the existence of the Barnslade weavers ! And yet they were well off, and fared gloriously in comparison with the generation of toilers that had preceded them, whose cruel wrongs had only obtained a poor redress when they had gained that eternal rest from labour and trouble, which to them was a relief from slavery. Those were the times when tiny children, who had scarcely more than learned to walk, stood at the loom-side the livelong day working, so it was called, till their baby faces got a worn, old look, and the heart's life was crushed out of them. But why pause longer over this painful picture of what was ? Pass on, cheered somewhat by the remembrance that their sobs and sighs were heard at last. Any change for the better, however slight, was a blessing, and though when it did come it amounted after all but to little, it began a work of reformation that, please God, will be even more fully carried out than has as yet been accomplished.

It was a dark, dreary night, and the rain was pouring down in torrents, as if to make up for the glorious brightness of the day that had preceded it. Few persons, unless compelled by business or unavoidable engagements, would have cared to be abroad in such weather ; indeed, the Barnslade streets were deserted and silent. The clock of the old parish church of St. Nicholas was just striking eleven, when, as the sound of the last note was dying away, two men came hurriedly over the bridge across the river Card, battling with the wind and rain

that beat in their faces. From the dress of one of them it was evident that he belonged to the better class of weavers, at least so far as it was possible to see by the light of the gas lamp at the corner of the quay, beneath which he and his companion came suddenly to a stand. The other was hidden by a long black coat, that almost reached to his heels, while his face was concealed by a large slouch hat, drawn down over his forehead till it nearly covered his eyes.

"Something must be done, Bill," said the taller of them, putting his head near to the other's ear, "now that young varmint's dead there's only Jerry and the Cripple left. I'm a drawing less money every week, though I wants just as much as ever I did. It's like my luck. All the others' lads is healthy and comfortable, but mine never seems to keep right at all."

"That's enough, George Brownlow," answered his companion, drawing away from him; "quite enough for to-night at least; however you may feel, I have not yet forgotten that once bright, happy boy, whom all at the factory loved, and——"

"Have done with that stuff," interrupted the person addressed, in an impatient and angry voice; "bother your preaching, the young brute's dead, and so much the better. It's all along of his own obstinacy; he never would do what he was told." But the man he had called Bill was gone, and he stood alone with his own thoughts, alone with his cruel heart in the dark night, in the driving rain. "Confound him!" muttered George Brownlow between his clenched teeth, "with his stuck-up ways and fine sayings. I owe him a long score for treating me as he

does, but I'll take care he don't get off without my paying it him in full some day or other. Confound him!" he repeated, hurrying on again as before.

George Brownlow was one of the most skilful weavers in Messrs. Bird and Lloyd's factory at Barnslade; he had been in their employ ever since they had started in business, and by dint of hard work, backed by a lavish exhibition of hypocritical zeal, had come to be regarded as a person whose services were invaluable. With the sanction of Messrs. Bird and Lloyd, certain of their workmen were allowed to introduce some four or five young lads as apprentices into the factory to learn the business of weaving. Among others Brownlow was so permitted, and for a considerable period had made no small profit out of the boys under his charge, who lived with him at his house in Mill Lane, and for whose united labour he received a by-no-means trifling sum. Unlike the other men, who were privileged to do the same, he had not been in the habit of receiving boys from people in Barnslade and the neighbourhood; but, on the contrary, there was no small mystery as to whence came the lads who, from time to time, entered the factory under his guidance. Dark hints and sinister rumours were whispered among the hands concerning him, and the women workers shuddered whenever they met him, giving him as wide a berth as possible. For a moment I must leave him stumbling up over the rough stones of Mill Lane towards his house, and say just a word to the person whom he had addressed as Bill.

William Warner, though still a young man in point of years, was to all appearances on the shady side of forty.

In the midst of his thick black hair there were streaks of silver grey, while about his mouth and eyes the lines were set deep and hard, and spoke plainly that he had suffered grievously in days past, and was walking about with the shadow of some secret sorrow as a constant and not to be got rid of companion. He too was employed in Messrs. Bird and Lloyd's factory, but in a superior position to Brownlow, being an assistant book-keeper in the counting-house, and a person in whom, to use Mr. Lloyd's own words, "they had the very greatest confidence, although in the first instance he had come to them without any recommendation or testimonials to his character." He was very reserved and taciturn ; indeed William Warner, or Bill, as he was best known, though exceedingly popular among the factory hands, had no intimate companion, and spent what time he had either in his humble lodging in the High Street alone, or in taking solitary walks out into the country. There was only one person with whom he was at all familiar, and that was George Brownlow. Never were two natures more entirely and utterly unlike than theirs ; and not a few of the weavers, who admired and liked Bill Warner, and proportionately detested Brownlow, found it difficult to understand how two persons so completely opposed in feeling and sentiment could consort together. Stranger than all, Brownlow seemed to possess no little influence with him, as if he had some hold over him, and was the only visitor who ever entered Bill's lodging. On the night when we made the acquaintance of these two men, they had been together to the hospital to see

how one of Brownlow's boys, who was a patient there, was getting on. Their visit was just in time to see him die, and to hear him gasp out with his last breath a wild, hoarse cry of "Mother." And with that he fell back into the nurse's arms, and was gone. So Jemmy, the bright, happy boy, as Bill Warner had called him, whom every man, woman, and child in Messrs. Bird and Lloyd's factory knew and loved, whose pranks were always creating endless amusement among them, who bore George Brownlow's kicks and blows without a murmur, went to his account, leaving that worthy to bemoan the cruel fate that had, as he looked at it, robbed not the lad of his life, but him of a source of pecuniary profit. Jemmy had never been known to possess any surname. It had been plain, simple Jemmy, from the first day when he was introduced into the factory; nothing more nor less down to the last, when the racking cough and the deep red spot upon his cheek attracted Bill Warner's attention, who, without a word, took him off to the hospital—and in five days he died!

But, back again to Brownlow, whose fingers are on the handle of his house door in Mill Lane. He can hear laughter from within, and two young voices joined in noisy concert. He passes in: and, at his entrance they are hushed in an instant, as if stricken dumb by magic. Considering the money that went through Brownlow's hands, the room was far from being even properly furnished. A bare brick floor, a couple of old chairs, and a rickety table in one corner, was all it

contained ; indeed, its whole appearance suggested that the proprietor was a poverty-stricken man. But, if the visitor had passed on to a little door in the corner, and opened it, he would have found his way into quite another sort of apartment, snug, cozy, and in every respect entirely different. The first of these was the boys' room—the other, Brownlow's private chamber, in which he received his friends and made himself at ease.

"Hold your tongue," he roared out, with a scowl on his face, as he passed through. "Can't you ever be quiet for a minute? What do you want screeching and howling like that for? It's a pity I don't give you something to call out about!" With that he disappeared into the second room, and slammed the door after him.

Jerry Green, the bigger of the two boys he had thus addressed, was a merry-looking lad of fourteen, with an eye that twinkled with fun and mischief, and a rollicking, reckless air about him, that somehow or other made you like him. He and dead Jemmy had been great friends, and, when the one was in hot water, he always had the consolation of being kept in countenance by the other. Jerry was strongly and sturdily built ; and, I am sorry to say, had gained a disagreeable notoriety by being the victorious combatant in more than one pugilistic encounter in the meadow behind the factory. "I ain't a going to be put upon," he would say, and he was a great deal too ready to vindicate his independence. Not that he was disposed to be quarrelsome, but some of Messrs. Bird and Lioyd's boys were rather fond of bullying new

comers, until they got a good thrashing at their hands; and it had taken some little time for Jerry to place himself in his proper position. His companion, who had shrunk into the chair by the fireplace, was cast in a very different mould; he it was whom Brownlow had called the Cripple—a name which had been given him in consequence of a deformity in his back, which had been brought about by an accident in the factory during the earlier days of his working there, and had well nigh proved fatal to him. As it was he still could make himself useful, though sometimes he grew pale and faint, and his face would show that he was suffering terribly when he had been employed longer than usual. Often, when this happened, Jerry would buckle to and work for both, till Brownlow's attention was attracted, when, with some harsh expression about the cripple's idleness, he would make him do his share. But now that I have occupied so much time in introducing some of the characters who play an important part in this story, let me float back into the current of my history, and glide on with it.

"I say, Mike," said Jerry, creeping up to the cripple's side, when Brownlow closed the door, "ain't he in a nice temper, that's all. The wind ain't a going to have it all to itself to-night, though it is a roaring so; there'll be a rare blowing up inside here afore the evening's out, I knows."

"It don't make much difference, Jerry, so long as he doesn't give me the cuff," was the answer. "Last night he struck me on the back with his fist, and it's made me bad all day."

"I'm blessed if it ain't shameful on him," growled Jerry, shaking his fist at the door through which Brownlow had passed, "to knock you about. I ain't made particular soft; and as long as he don't kick my shins, I can stand his vicious taps with them ugly knuckles of his. But, arter all, he might let you alone."

"It do come rather hard sometimes," said Mike, "when I haven't been doing nothing; and the older I get the more it seems to hurt me when he hits me. Jerry," he continued, taking hold of his companion's hand and pressing it between both of his, "do you know that I feel I shall not live very long; perhaps not another year. I haven't told you before, but I've had a deal more pain lately, and I don't feel able to work as I used."

"Go on with you," interrupted Jerry, shaking his head; "you're as right as I am. What's the use of making yourself miserable like this. Why, I'm bothered if you ain't a blubbering!" he continued, seeing the tears in Mike's eyes. "Stop them waterworks; there's wet enough outside."

With that he knelt down beside the cripple's chair, and speaking more softly when he saw how weak and ill his friend was, tried to soothe him; but Nature's best relief could not be checked, and, resting his head on Jerry's shoulder, Mike wept. Thus they remained for some minutes, when they were startled by the inner door opening, and Brownlow stepping into the room.

"Go to bed; I ain't a going to have candles wasted, nor coals neither, so be off," he rapped out. "Hullo,

what are you snivelling about?" he added, crossing towards where Mike was sitting ; "you're the most ungrateful young brute I ever had to do with."

"He ain't well, guvnor," pleaded Jerry ; "his back's been a troubling him."

"Confound his back," roared Brownlow ; "it's bad enough to keep such a useless bit of lumber, let alone having him always grumbling and complaining. What with Jemmy a dying, and this here cripple being fit for nothing, things is coming to a pretty pass. I'll give you a good clout over the head, you young varmint," he continued, dealing a blow at Mike, who jumped off his chair and retreated into the corner, though not before Jerry had stepped in front of him and received it full on his head in his stead.

"That came pretty hard, guvnor," said Jerry, rising on one knee, for the blow had sent him to the ground, but speaking quite quietly and calmly as if nothing had happened. "So Jemmy's dead, is he? Well, I ain't surprised, seeing as how he had a goodish many of these in his time."

Brownlow raised his fist as if he would strike the boy again, then with a muttered curse he turned on his heel and disappeared into his own room. As he did so, Mike came to Jerry's side, who was rubbing his head, and kissed him, saying, "God bless you ; I never shall forget this night, never."

And the cripple kept his word.

And what of George Brownlow? Crouching over the fire in his own room, puffing clouds of smoke moodily

from his pipe, with no sound to disturb him but the monotonousplash of the rain against his own door, and the rushing sighs and moans of the wind, he sat alone thinking and thinking far into the night. But ever before him, sleeping or waking, in the sunlight or the fire's bright glow, went a shadow, marching before with measured steps and slow, the shadow of a woman, with pale-worn face and sorrowful eyes. "You swore you would love and cherish him," it seemed to say, and then there echoed in his ears, "He had a goodish many of these in his time."

Nor rest nor peace henceforth ; on the verge of a dark and deep abyss, unfathomable, impenetrable, save in the last fatal plunge that teaches us to comprehend the "for ever and ever," with the din of an outraged conscience ringing in his head and driving him nigh to madness, he cowered in his chair until morning !





CHAPTER VI.

“KIDNAPPED.”

Twas an indisputable fact that the great Rhomboid, on the particular morning when we return to his company, was in a very bad temper. Whether his breakfast, or Mrs. Rhomboid, had disagreed with him I am unable to state, but it was beyond all doubt that he looked as black as the heavens before a thunderstorm; and had struck terror into the breasts of his juvenile subjects from the moment he made his appearance in his desk—everything was wrong and went wrong. The first class, which consisted of the oldest and most advanced pupils in the academy, were turned back in repetition, and warned, with many threatening gestures, that if they failed a second time corporal punishment would be inflicted on each and every one of them. One wretched youth, who had been remanded for execution from the previous day for shooting hair-pins out of a catapult at Rhomboid’s black cat, was operated on in the presence of the whole school; the pedagogue between

each stroke taking care to improve the occasion after the following fashion :—

Whack ! (Howls from the wretched youth.) *Rhomboid* : “ Brutality unexampled ; I hope all will see what such misconduct leads to.” Whack again ! (Further howls and writhings.) *Rhomboid* : “ He does not cry because he is sorry, but because the cane hurts him, and yet he did not think how much he might hurt the poor cat.” Whack, whack, whack ! and thus, till his arm grew tired and his voice weak, when, with a parting cut across the shoulders that made the culprit yell again, he sent him back to his seat.

“ I say, ain’t old Fireworks in a wax,” whispered the boy who sat at the next desk to our hero ; “ there will be some more to have it before he’s done. Look out ; he’s got his eye fixed on you,” continued that young gentleman, suddenly appearing to take the most intense interest in the book before him, while Oliver, who was examining a new pocket-knife that Sam had given him the night before, got rather red in the face, and hurriedly thrust his present into his pocket, shutting it hastily at imminent peril to his fingers.

“ What are you about, Hill ? ” squeaked Rhomboid, hopping out of his desk. “ This is the fourth time I’ve had to speak to you about inattention ; I see talking is no use, so come out here.” With that he waved his cane over his head as an Indian would brandish his tomahawk. But Oliver objected to the invitation, and instead of responding to it remained sitting quite still, though with very serious apprehensions as to what would follow.

"Don't you hear," yelled the pedagogue, getting white with rage; for, as his wife would say, contradiction did so fly to his head. "What do you mean by not coming? Obedience before everything; come this moment and be caned."

Now Oliver was anything but a coward, for he had learned to hold his own with most boys of his age, and the more passionate Rhomboid got the less frightened he became. Sam, whether rightly or wrongly it is unnecessary to inquire, had once said, in Oliver's presence, that he would not allow him to be flogged; and somehow or other, when he saw Rhomboid dancing about with his cane in his hand, the young gentleman himself made up his mind that he would not be beaten by him. Consequently, though that worthy grew hotter and hotter, and screamed louder and louder for him to come forth, he neither moved hand or foot. At length Rhomboid, feeling that to allow himself to be thus defied did not add to his dignity, determined that he would drag Oliver from his seat and administer the punishment with which he had threatened him. But he had reckoned without his host; for when the boy saw him rushing towards him he seized a big glass inkstand that was on the desk before him, and dashed it in Rhomboid's face with all his might. The consequences were exceedingly disastrous; the missile broke, and discharged its contents all over him, cutting his face, and smothering him with ink. But it stopped him, and a shout of delight rang through the schoolroom at his discomfiture; and the general verdict, in which all most heartily concurred

was, "Served him right." Like most persons who are so free in knocking others about, Rhomboid himself was a craven and coward; and he rushed out into his own room in a state of terror, possessed with a belief that he was about to be murdered by his pupils, who were thirsting to revenge their wrongs upon him at this convenient opportunity. The scene that followed may be more easily imagined than described; left to themselves, classical and commercial pupils alike combined to raise a paeon of triumph which made the schoolroom echo again!

It was an hour or more before Rhomboid reappeared in his desk, and then he was accompanied by a stranger, with whom he remained for some minutes in earnest conversation.

"You're going to catch it, Olley," was a remark freely offered to Oliver by his schoolfellows, who now looked upon him as a hero, and thought him a far greater one than Leonidas of Sparta in every respect.

The face of Rhomboid's companion was hidden by a dark beard and moustache, which effectually concealed his features, and gave him a somewhat foreign appearance.

"I want to find one as much like him as I can," he whispered to Rhomboid; "the same coloured hair and eyes. Women have such memories, you know."

"Look across there," said the pedagogue, clutching him by the arm, and turning his glance in the direction of Oliver, "how would he do?"

The stranger remained silent for a moment, gazing

intently at Oliver, and then, having taken a survey of the other pupils, murmured under his breath, "Yes, yes, he'll do best. There ain't no great difference. I've only a word or two more to say," he added.

"Hush!" interrupted Rhomboid, "keep that till we're alone. Boys!" he went on aloud, "you can go for an hour's play, after which we will resume our studies." And then he and the stranger disappeared through the private door, and the academy was left to take care of itself.

There was no little discussion among the boys as to the interpretation of this strange and altogether unaccountable conduct on Rhomboid's part. All kinds of speculations were indulged in as to what course he would adopt; some asserting that Oliver would be publicly expelled, while others went the length of declaring their belief that he was only taking a rest to get his strength up, in order that he might avenge the insult that had been offered to him. Their deliberations were interrupted by the appearance in the playground of the wretched youth who rejoiced in the name of Buttons; whose office it was to clean the boots, knives, and forks, and make himself generally useful to the academy. His physiognomy was of a melancholy cast, partly by reason of his painful experiences at the hands of Rhomboid and the toes of his pupils, but chiefly because he was the victim of a hopeless attachment to a young lady of fourteen, who presided in the pastry cook's shop round the corner.

"Master wants you in his room," said the bright

specimen, making his way to Oliver, and pointing with his finger to the house. "Come on," he added, catching our hero by the arm, who, however, made no objection to going, but with a laugh went along with him, and in a very few moments more found himself in the presence of the outraged pedagogue and the stranger with the beard. Rhomboid was smiling and smirking in the most friendly manner, and received him in a way he had little anticipated. Meanwhile the stranger was looking out of the window into the street, where Oliver saw a cab standing just in front of a side door that led direct out of Rhomboid's room on to the pavement.

"Come here, Hill," said Rhomboid, stretching out his hand, "I must try and forget what happened this—"

Before he could hear the sentence finished, Oliver felt himself seized by some one from behind, and in a second more he was lying on his back on the floor, while the stranger knelt over him and held him round his throat with a choking gripe that prevented him uttering a word. "If you make a sound I'll kill you," hissed his assailant between his teeth. "Quick!" he continued to Rhomboid, who was standing by; "the rope. There is no time to be lost."

In a few seconds more Oliver was bound hand and foot, while his throat was still compressed so that he could not make a single cry for help; and then something was thrust into his mouth that hurt him very much, and deprived him of the power to articulate. Meanwhile Rhomboid was grinning at him with fiendish delight, and rendering the stranger every assistance.

When Oliver had been thoroughly bound and gagged, Rhomboid took a sack that was lying on a chair and held it open, when the stranger caught our hero up in his arms and put him into it; and then, what with the pain and fright the boy fainted, and neither heard nor saw more.

When he came to himself he found he was still in the sack, lying full length and bound as before, but, from certain movements beneath him, he knew that he was being carried along at a rapid pace. Then he heard the prolonged screech of a railway whistle, and it required no very violent effort of the imagination to arrive at the conclusion that he was in the train. The thing that was in his mouth when he fainted had been taken out, and he was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity that was now accorded to him to use his lungs, which he proceeded to do with all his might. The result was that he first received a violent kick, and next felt himself seized by the hair of his head and dragged out of the sack. He found he was, as he expected, in a railway carriage, and alone with a strange man.

That man was George Brownlow!

"Hark, you youngster," he hissed at Oliver between his clenched teeth, holding him by the collar of his jacket with one hand, while with the other he pointed a revolver at his head, "if you make the least noise, I'll let you have something that will prevent you ever calling out again. I'm a desperate man, and those who makes themselves contrary, I always takes care to cure with desperate remedies. Do you understand that?" he

added, pushing the shrinking boy on to the seat in front of him. "You're in the express, and if you were to holloa till you were hoarse no one would hear you, so you'd best hold your tongue, or I shall have to shove the gag into your mouth again, and fasten you up in the sack. Now, look here, if you'll promise to keep quiet and go with me when the train stops without making a noise, I'll unfasten them cords. But no playing me false," he concluded, making the lock of the revolver "click," and almost thrusting the muzzle into Oliver's face.

It can readily be understood that, under the existing state of things, a young boy like our hero was thoroughly cowed and terrified into acquiescence. Indeed, he was only too glad to get the cords, which were cutting his arms and legs severely, unfastened at any price, and he did not hesitate to make the required promise. In a few moments he was released from his bonds, and was able to sit and look out of the window in comfort.

The sky was cloudy and overcast, and showed signs that betokened the approach of a storm. As the train dashed along an embankment that was protected on either side by a plantation of firs, the wind seemed to be moaning and crying among the trees, which gently inclined their heads as if in salutation to the passing travellers. Then came a sound as of distant thunder, and presently a flash of lightning seemed to pass through the carriage in which Brownlow and his prisoner were sitting. The man's face turned ashen pale, and he put up his fingers to his eyes.

"I thought it had struck me blind," he murmured affrightedly to himself; "it was so terrible bright!"

And now the thunder crashed as if it would split the heavens asunder, while the lightning danced and flitted in among the firs, and then the rain came pouring down seemingly seeking to extinguish it. So through the midst of the summer storm the train rushed on and on, till at length it reached Barnslade Station.

"Hallo!" said the guard, opening the door of the compartment in which Brownlow and Oliver were, "I thought you asked to be locked in alone?"

"Did you?" responded Brownlow, "then you made a mistake, for see here are two tickets," he added, taking them from his pocket; "at least one, and a half one for the kid."

"Oh, all right, I suppose I was wrong!" growled the guard, going forward to another part of the train.

In a moment more, George Brownlow and Oliver were passing up Barnslade High Street, in the direction of Mill Lane.





CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE OLIVER'S RETURN.

THAT can easily be imagined that Oliver's sudden and altogether unaccountable disappearance carried consternation and dismay into Sam's cottage. There was a mystery about it which baffled explanation, for Rhomboid declared, how stoutly it is needless to say, that when Oliver left him on the momentous afternoon it was to go direct home. "There had been a little disagreement," said the estimable pedagogue, "and I thought it best to give him a half-holiday and allow him to recover from the effects of the storm." Surely a most worthy and respectable man was the unctuous and virtuous Rhomboid. Sam was completely overcome by his assumed candour and well acted condolence, so that the only place where he might have ferretted out information about the lost boy he turned his back upon, and sought for traces of him where it was impossible any could be found. And thus it is, my children, that over and over again in the strange vagaries

and turnings of this eccentric life of ours, we look about in every direction but the right one for what is lying at our feet all the time.

As days and then weeks passed away, and no Oliver came back, Janet grew more and more silent and melancholy. At first she had hoped against hope, and would not believe that her old playmate was irrecoverably gone. When the evening came on and tea-time arrived, she would put up his own little chair to the table, and then sit down by it as had been her wont ; but no cheery, childish laugh, no warm kiss greeted her attention with thanks, as of yore. Everything seemed to her to grow darker and darker, and the eternal night to which she was condemned blacker and blacker. Her father was never at home now, all his leisure he devoted to hunting for traces of Oliver ; while Aunt Sally, into whose heart the boy had crept, and who loved him like a mother, could not bear to talk about him ; in fact, on one occasion, while occupied in making a pudding, when she and Janet had engaged in a discussion as to what could have become of him, her feelings were too much for her, and she wept so profusely over the paste and chopped apples, that when the compound came to be eaten, she declared "it hadn't a morsel of flavour."

So Janet was compelled to nurse her troubles, and gradually to learn that lesson of bitter experience, which teaches all of us that no impatience or irritation can vary the dispensations of Providence. Sometimes she would sit by the open window, those silent eyes of hers turned upward as if gazing into the heavens, made glorious by

the dying sun. She could see nothing, appreciate none of its beauties ; but when the light breeze played among the laurels in the little garden in which Sam took such delight, it seemed to bear upon its bosom a soft and sighing sound as of melody floating in mid air, and bearing a message to her from the world of spirits ; and often and often there went up a wailing prayer from the loving blind girl's lips, "Oh, come back to me, come back to me, my darling brother ! "

Three months had elapsed since Oliver disappeared, and still neither traces nor tidings had Sam been able to obtain concerning him. Every effort had been made, not a stone left unturned, but search and inquiry alike proved fruitless, and with a heavy heart Sam felt within himself that there was nothing more to be done.

"No, Sally," said he one night when he was smoking his pipe after supper, "there ain't no use keeping on at it any longer ; all this three months I ain't learned a bit more than when I started. The lad's either been decoyed and mur——!" the word stuck in his throat, but with a gulp he went boldly at it, and continued : "murdered for the sake of his clothes, or been taken aboard some outward bound."

"Lor, Sam," said Aunt Sally, in her usual jerky style, "the idea of one a doing any harm to that poor child for the sake of the things he'd got on. Why they were the oldest he had, and the lot of them wasn't worth five and sixpence."

"Ah ! Sally, Sally," replied Sam, shaking his head gravely, "there's many a bad deed been done for a

precious sight less than that sum." And then Sam puffed his pipe more vigorously than before; and when Aunt Sally happened to turn her back to him for a moment, he took occasion to brush away two big tears that had gathered in the corners of his eyes. Aunt Sally, too, was not quite herself, for, without giving any reason, she suddenly got up from her seat and disappeared through the door. My position as story-teller enables me to state that outside she had a rare good cry all to herself. Meanwhile, Janet, who had never said a word during the preceding conversation, was rocking backwards and forwards on her chair, moaning quietly to herself.

"What's the matter, Janet?" said Sam, suddenly noticing that his beloved daughter's face was pale and worn; "are you not well, my lass?" he added, stretching out his hand and taking hers; "you're as white as the tablecloth."

"I'm not ill, father," replied Janet; but her looks belied her words, and almost at the moment she uttered them she fell fainting in Sam's arms who had jumped up to catch her. Aunt Sally came in opportunely at the instant, and soon, with her womanly skill and attention, had restored the child to consciousness.

"Sam," she whispered to her brother, while Janet's head rested on her bosom, "if she goes on fretting and worriting herself much longer I won't answer for her living the year out."

"Don't say that, Sally," murmured Sam in a broken voice; "don't say that. I have had to stand a good deal in my time, but I couldn't get over that."

It is a poor heart that never rejoices ; and I am afraid that, if I keep on giving them so much of the dismal and melancholy, I shall have my young people calling out at me. Having reduced the three inmates of the cottage to the depth of misery and despair, I think that the least I can do for them is to cheer them up a bit. You, my dear young master and mistress, will find when the time arrives for you to come in contact with the realities of grown-up existence, that by some strange and wayward fancy of fate, joys and sorrows seldom come single-handed. For awhile the tide of constant grief seems as if it would sweep you away ; the nearest and dearest drop off one after another like leaves in autumn. But then comes a change, everything you put your hand to is successful, happiness and good fortune are your inseparable companions. Nay, think not that I want to preach, only remember that the sun cannot shine nor the flowers bloom every day. And if they could, we human beings are so inconsistent that perpetual roses and fine weather would become wearisome.

There was a brisk tap at the outer door of the cottage, which made Aunt Sally jump, and brought Sam to his feet. Eleven o'clock at night, and a visitor. Who could it be ? Perhaps some one bringing back Oliver. The thought made Sam reach the door in half-a-dozen strides ; he opened it, and there, standing on the step, was a man by himself.

"What do you want ?" growled Sam in none the best of tempers, for the sudden revulsion of feelings that followed ; "Is there a fire ?"

"What, Sam, don't you know me?" inquired the stranger, facing round to him.

And of course, when Sam heard the voice, he knew that it belonged to no other person than his brother Oliver. Right glad was he to see him, and, seizing him by the hand, he dragged him into the little parlour, to the intense astonishment of Aunt Sally and Janet.

When he had had his supper, and an allowance of grog had been served out to him, he made Janet come and sit by him, and held her hand in his while Sam told him all about our hero—how he had saved his life, adopted him, and they had named him after Uncle Oliver. I cannot refrain from saying just one word with respect to the personal appearance of Captain Hill, better known on board his ship, the *Sweet William*, as Admiral Junk. He looked a thorough rough tough old sailor, full of pluck and energy, and every inch of him born to dare the perils of salt water. His eye was clear and fearless, and had many a time before now, in the midst of storm and tempest, inspired the timid with courage by its intrepid brightness. The *Sweet William* was Captain Hill's own property, and during the ten years she had been in his possession he had managed to accumulate a very nice little fortune, though he always studiously avoided saying one word as to what he was worth. He had neither chick nor child; indeed, his brother Sam, who was considerably younger than he, was the only relative he possessed in the world. He had just completed a three years' cruise in the China seas,

which had been productive of great pecuniary profit, and he had now brought the *Sweet William* home again, laden with a rich and valuable cargo which he had invested in on his own account. There was one thing he had made up his mind to, which was that Sam should give up the "fireman" business, and take to something more properly fitted for the brother of a capitalist like himself. If his figure was a trifle stunted, and perhaps even a little dumpy, Captain Oliver Hill, skipper and owner of the *Sweet William*, possessed a heart that compensated for all deficiencies of that sort ; whether on board his ship among his crew, or on shore in the midst of his friends, he was the object of the most undisguised admiration and affection.

"And so the poor little beggar has been laid hold of," he said, as Sam brought his story about Oliver to a conclusion. "It's a precious rum thing that in this old London people can be 'tucked up' so nice and quiet that they are never heard of again. And so you named him after me, did you, Janet?" he inquired of Janet, who, as he spoke the last sentence, had risen from the footstool on which he was sitting.

"Yes, I did, uncle," she replied : "and oh, if you had only seen him, I am sure you would have loved him dearly. Uncle Oliver," she continued, with an intensity and earnestness of manner quite new to her, "father and Aunt Sally, I know, think he is dead—that the people who took him away have killed him ; but I don't. I can't believe it—they never could be so cruel. Dear Uncle, do try and find him, and let me go with you."

And with that she sank on her knees at the old sailor's feet, and put her hands up to him imploringly.

"Dear, dear," broke in Aunt Sally, nervously, "her head's getting quite light. Come, Jenny, darling," she went on, rising and endeavouring to lift her up, "it's nearly half-past twelve o'clock, and you will be very ill if you don't go to bed."

"Oh, Uncle Oliver, do promise me," still pleaded Janet.

"That I will, my beauty," replied the old man, kissing her on the forehead; "and if you'll go to bed and get up with rosy cheeks in the morning, I'll see if we can't set to work to-morrow." Janet was satisfied with that, and bidding them all good night, followed her aunt out of the room.

"That child is ill," said Oliver, still looking at his brother, and shaking his head seriously; "she'll soon be wanting the doctor."

"Ever since the boy has been lost," said Sam, "she's fretted and fretted; and though I've told all sorts of tales to make her think that I had got traces of him, she always seemed to see through them all."

"Look you here," burst out the other, jumping up from his chair, evidently in a state of great nervous excitement, "are you my brother Sam?"

"What on earth do you mean?" was the answer; "of course I am."

"Ain't you the only living relative I've got?"

"I believe so," replied Sam, astonished at the sudden change in his brother's demeanour; "but what of that?"

"What of that?" roared the now excited sailor ; "I'll tell you.. I'm going to sell the *Sweet William* and retire, and what's more, I'm going to make you give up the fire engine and cold water business, and have you and Sally and Janet live with me. I've not been slaving all these years for nothing. I won't hear a word you've got to say. I mean to have my own way, and what's more, I'm going to take the child off with me in the morning, and give her a run somewhere to the seaside for a week or two." He would have said more, but was interrupted by Aunt Sally hurriedly opening the door. Her face was very pale, and wore an anxious look.

"Sam," she said in a whisper, "you must go for the doctor, the poor child is very strange and light-headed ; I don't want to frighten you, but you must go at once."

Sam required no prompting, but almost before she had finished was striding away to the doctor's at the corner of the street, where he hammered with the knocker and pulled with the bell with such vehemence that that worthy individual was compelled to put his head out of the window and remonstrate.

"Is she very ill?" asked Uncle Oliver of Aunt Sally.

"Only God's mercy can bring her round," murmured Aunt Sally under her breath, as she hurried away to Janet's bedside.

All through that night there raged a fierce battle in Sam's cottage ; life and death grappled one another by the throat for the possession of the childish form that lay writhing and tortured by the burning fever ; and the doctor, as he stood by and watched the conflict, knew

not how it would end. As the first ray of the rising sun lit up the window of the sick room, a little bird, I should not be surprised if he were after all but a London sparrow, lighted on the ledge outside, and twittered so cheerily. His song was but a poor burlesque of melody at the best, still it was heard and noticed by the sufferer; she had raved and wandered, but she was more peaceful now, and as the sound greeted her ear a smile lit up her face. "Father!" she called "bend down, I want to whisper to you;" and when Sam did so she went on, "I don't think I am going to die."

So the fountain once again sparkled as before, and its bright waters bubbled into life again.





CHAPTER VIII.

WEAVING A WEB.

DURING the earlier days of his captivity Oliver was inconsolable, and made Brownlow furious by the way in which he obstinately repelled all his advances. Not that his captor wasted much time in trying to soothe him, for when he went out to the factory in the morning he would lock him into a small attic at the top of the house, and leave him there a prisoner till dinner time. For Brownlow was as yet afraid to trust him with his liberty, lest the first use he should make of it would be to run away.

More than a week passed, and still the boy remained untamed. Like the frightened wild bird, who beats and flutters against the wires of his cage, refusing to be comforted, so Oliver crouched in a corner of the little room, sullen and silent, scarcely eating or drinking a mouthful, and never speaking a word. In fact the matter began to get serious, and Brownlow felt that he must take some decisive step to bring things to a crisis. Thought he to

himself, "If I can't force a boy of twelve into submission it's a pity." So one evening he hurried home from work a trifle earlier than usual, determined upon frightening Oliver into obedience. The opportunity he had chosen was in every respect likely to prove a fortunate one for the success of his enterprise. Oliver had begun to grow weary of his imprisonment, and his empty stomach was getting the better of his pride ; moreover, he longed to breathe the fresh air once again, and to bask in the bright sunshine which struggled in through the small window of his prison house. To get his liberty, whatever the conditions, was uppermost in his mind. As he came to this conclusion the key rattled in the lock of the door, and in a moment more Brownlow stood before him.

"Come, get up out of that," snarled his visitor, giving him a kick. "I ain't a going to stand any more of this sulking, young gentleman, so the sooner you make up your mind to look pleasant the better for you. Now, do you mean to make a change ?" he continued, taking Oliver by the collar and draggin him up from his sitting posture on to his feet. "You know what I told you before ; I am a desperate man, and I'm going to make an end of this, one way or the other."

"You won't make me do what you want by kicking me " exclaimed Oliver, stoutly.

"Oh, indeed, my tender chicken !" laughed Brownlow, sarcastically, holding our hero even more tightly in his grasp than before, and leering fiendishly at him. "So it didn't like being kicked, didn't it ? How does it like that ?" he added, giving Oliver's ear a playful pinch with

his finger that made him cry out with pain. "That's the way we treat tender chickens in these parts, and keep them from misbehaving."

The strong man watched the shadow of fear spreading over the shrinking child's face ; he saw the flush mount into his cheek, and then as suddenly fade away again till he was pale as death. It was but a poor victory after all to have won, and yet he chuckled within him ; George Brownlow would have gloried if he had only kicked a starving cur into submission ! Ruffian and coward though he was, he possessed the power of knowing how to take advantage of other people's weaknesses when he had terrified them with his blustering. Oliver was the mouse and he the cat, and he took good care to let his prey understand that at any moment he could make the fatal spring, and dispose of him in a twinkling. And as I have before said, our hero was weak and exhausted, and was in anything but a condition to offer a prolonged resistance. Like a dog beaten into obedience, he followed at Brownlow's heels when he left the room. But his teeth were not drawn neither was his spirit crushed, and the time came when he made them both feel with compound interest for the waiting.

Brownlow led him downstairs into the boys' room, where Jerry and the Cripple were sitting, making the best meal they could off some very fat mutton and equally stale bread, which almost seemed to crumble as they lifted it to their mouths. "Here, you boys," said Brownlow, taking Oliver by the shoulder and pushing him into the centre of the room, "I've brought you a new mate ;

you'll have to look after him up at the factory, do you hear, and take care he don't get into mischief."

Jerry had jumped up from his seat the moment he saw Oliver, and was gaping at him opened-mouthed, his eyes almost starting out of his head. Mike, too, seemed strangely moved.

"Why, I'm blest if it ain't Jemmy come back again," blundered Jerry, unable to resist the temptation of saying out what he thought within.

"Capital ! capital !" muttered Brownlow to himself, his face beaming with satisfaction, and rubbing his hands with pleasure. "It couldn't be better." Then, turning to the three boys, he continued aloud, "There, now, that will do, you'll get on capitally, I see, together. And hark you," he whispered threateningly to Jerry, grasping him by the arm, as in a vice, "you'll try and think it is Jemmy come back again, won't you. You understand me." Then, with a look of meaning he strode to the door, and opening it, passing out into Mill Lane, locking it behind him. It was a strange picture to see these three lads during the first few minutes after he left them together, exchanging furtive glances, but never so much as speaking a word. The Cripple was so overcome by something that he ceased eating, while Jerry, whose appetite never gave way to his feelings, went on munching, regaling himself the while by taking sly looks over his hunk of bread at Oliver, whose empty stomach began to suggest that an imitation of his proceedings would be in a high degree satisfactory.

The spell that seemed upon them all was at length

broken by Mike, who getting from his seat, crept over to Oliver, and touching him with his hand, said, "You ain't Jemmy, are you?"

"No, my name is Oliver," replied our hero. And then, warmed into confidence at the ice being thus broken, he ventured—"And if you please I am very hungry, and should like something to eat."

"Well, there ain't much to have," responded Jerry, with greedy indifference, for he only had two meals in the day, and when he got to them he did full justice to the viands, I can tell you. "The guvnor's been keeping us precious short of prog."

"Have some of my supper," entreated Mike; "there's a great deal more than I can manage; there's a beautiful bit of fat left, and such a nice crust, too," he added, pressing the dainty morsel on Oliver, to whom, under any other circumstances, it would have been simply nauseating; but there is an old saying that hunger is the best sauce, and what he would have turned up his nose at in the old days at Sam's cottage he now accepted readily and devoured with evident relish. And the Cripple stood by, and watched him with that intense feeling of satisfaction which is only known to the kind and generous heart.

When Brownlow returned home that evening he found the three boys on the best terms with one another, Jerry and Oliver listening with evident and undisguised delight to a story which Mike was telling for their edification. His evil designs had prospered so well when put into execution that he actually allowed himself to be pleased, and he paused for a moment to say something agreeable

to the youngsters before sending them off to bed. This condescension on his part literally took Jerry's and Mike's breath away; as for Oliver he was in such a whirl of novel excitement consequent on all he had gone through, that he scarcely knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels. "Jemmy's to go to work to morrow at the factory," he remarked, in the most ordinary manner, patting Oliver on the shoulder; "you'll take charge of him, Jerry, and see that none of the rough ones knock him about."

"Jemmy," exclaimed Jerry, in amazement, "where is he?"

"Don't you see?" replied Brownlow, still patting Oliver on the shoulder in the cat-and-mouse fashion. "Here. This is Jemmy!"

"But, sir," persevered Jerry, in a state of bewilderment, "I—"

"Not a word," broke in Brownlow, with a look that forbade further parley. "I say Jemmy and that is enough. Mark you, Mike, too, I say Jemmy, so let there be no mistake."

When Mike lay upon his little bed that night, sleepless and worn by that wearing pain of which he complained so seldom, he could not help murmuring to himself, "He said his name was Oliver, and yet we are to call him Jemmy; I can't make it out, I can't make it out." And Jerry, as he turned on his side to sleep, muttered, "He's up to one of his games, I know, I wonder what it is?" As for Oliver, he was too worn and exhausted to reflect, and was soon dreaming of his lost home, and Sam, and Aunt Sally, and Janet!



CHAPTER IX.

MONA LLOYD.

MR. LLOYD, who was the acting partner in the firm of Bird and Lloyd, the proprietors of the factory at which Brownlow worked, was a very popular man in the town of Barnslade. Since his first connection with the place he had identified himself with its interests, and for several years had sat as its representative in Parliament. He was a cheerful, pleasant-spoken gentleman, and his face always beamed with pleasure and good temper. Not that Mr. Jonas Lloyd had gone without his share of suffering in this world. He had a sorrow at his heart, the quality of which was only known to himself. His wife, to whom he had been devotedly attached, had died suddenly, leaving him to journey on to the end of his days with no other household companion than a little daughter, named Mona. When Mrs. Lloyd went to her rest the child was scarcely two years old, but by some strange disposition of nature her baby mind seemed expanded to comprehend her

father's sorrow, and in the evening when he came home from business, and sat down by his lonely fireside, she would creep into the room, and find her way to his knee, and then clambering up rest her cheek against his. And how that great, strong man pressed her to his heart, and recalled the prayer that hung upon his lips that he might follow her who could never return to him !

The child is father of the man, so it is said, and Mona's babyhood only shadowed forth what she became as she grew older. A perfect little princess in beauty of form and feature, with a manner that made every man, woman, and child that came in contact with her love her. Wherever she went she had a bright look and a kind word for all, and when she came clattering into the streets of Barnslade, on the back of her pony, Nancy, she seemed to bring sunshine with her. She was a young lady of considerable resolution, and one day, so the story ran, had alighted from the before-mentioned Nancy to interfere in an unequal contest that was going on outside her father's factory gate between two boys, one of whom was considerably bigger and stronger than the other. Of course she took the weaker side, and disposed of the bully by threatening to use her riding whip over his shoulders, and he, quailing at the determined look in her eyes, desisted without a word, and took himself off.

There was one person in her father's factory for whom Mona entertained a very warm affection, and that was William Warner. He had been in the habit of coming up almost every evening to see Mr. Lloyd at his house

on business matters, and had given her as a baby many a ride to Banbury Cross. As I have before stated, Mr. Lloyd had the greatest confidence in William Warner, and when he had to be absent from Barnslade, attending to his parliamentary duties in London, not only was the business of the counting-house left entirely in his hands, but his employer would ask him "to give a look to his little girl now and then." And in the gloom and darkness of his blighted life, to love and watch over his master's daughter with all the anxiety and interest of a parent, was as a bright interval of sunshine !

It was a lovely August evening, and Bill Warner stood at the gate of the small apology for a garden that lay in front of the house in which he lodged. There was a calm serenity in the heavens, that seemed to breathe of peace and tranquility, and for once to find an echo in his breast, and there was a happier look upon his face than had rested there for many a long day !

"Lost to me," he murmured to himself, "lost to me for evermore. Would that I could forget the past ! Why can I not blot it out from memory ?" he added, almost angrily. "There is much about me that is bright now, and some men would give their ears for my chances of getting on. Bah ! I have no strength of will ; that has been my curse, and will be to the end."

And then he went on muttering to himself, till the old worn and gloomy look came back to his face again, and the cloud rested upon him once more. Lost in this reverie, he did not notice Mona gallop up on her pony, and it was only when she touched him gently on the

shoulder with her riding whip that he was aware of her presence.

"Well, I never did see such a great sleepy thing," remarked the young lady, flinging the reins on Nancy's neck, and clapping her hands together. "I do declare he was taking a nap standing up, just like Nancy does when I keep her waiting for me in the sun."

William Warner, aroused from his reflections, went out through the little gate, and stood at Mona's side.

"And pray, Miss Impertinence," he inquired, with a smile on his face, for the sight of her had done his eyes good, "what right have you to traduce my character in a public place in this way? I wasn't asleep; I was thinking."

"Thinking, indeed!" repeated Mona, derisively, with a pert toss of her dainty head; "are you always thinking. I believe you think when you are asleep; that I do."

"If I don't think when I'm asleep, Mona," replied he, sadly and gravely, "I do what is worse; I dream—dream of happy times long, long ago, when the world seemed as bright and joyous to me as it does to you now. But come, little lady," he continued, seeing that his tone and manner had excited a look of pain in the child's face, "I am a cross-grained old grumbler, and ought to know better than to give way to my evil propensities such a splendid evening as this."

"You are a dear, kind old boy," exclaimed Mona, putting her face forward to him to be kissed, an invitation he accepted at once; "but I won't have you say cruel things of my second papa, for he's the best, and dearest, and darlingest old fellow in the world."



"Poor, poor second papa!" said Mona, gently drawing one of her hands from his, and passing it coaxingly over his face."

Second papa was the name she sometimes called Bill Warner by, and Mr. Lloyd used jokingly to declare that he believed she thought a great deal more of papa No. 2 than papa No. 1. "And now, little lady," inquired Bill Warner, when he had picked up the reins that had fallen over Nancy's ears, and placed them in Mona's hands, "Is there any thing your second papa can do to oblige you this evening?"

"Yes, there is," she answered, looking so winningly into his face. "As a great treat, I want you to take me down the river as far as the meadow near to Dedenham Weir, where the wild strawberries grow. Please don't say no, or I shall be so disappointed, for papa won't trust me on the water with any one else."

"Or if he did, and I refused," said Warner, laughing, "you would have some one else you could try to wheedle. But I don't know of anything," he added, "to prevent my acceding to your wish; so first of all we'll go and put Nancy comfortably up at the 'King's Arms' stables, and then make our way down to the boat-house."

Mona was delighted at having gained her petition, and giving Nancy a flip with her whip, went galloping up the street in the direction of the "King's Arms," while Warner followed on more leisurely.

Although this was such a lovely evening, it had been anything but a fine summer, and the ordinarily unpretentious river Card was swollen out of all its usual proportions by the recent heavy rains, which had made its current run swift and strong, and rendered boating a matter of hard labour rather than amusement. As

Warner reached the boat-house with Mona, and saw the pace at which the stream was driving along, he hesitated for a moment as to whether it would not be better to put off the excursion for a day or two, but he did not like to disappoint his companion, and then he was so thoroughly at home on the water, and so skilful with his oars, that he felt there was not the slightest cause for apprehension.

In a very few minutes the boat was launched, and they were afloat, moving briskly along in the direction of Dedenham Weir, which lay about a mile and a half down the river below Barnslade, and the roar of whose tumbling waters was distinctly audible. Mona sat still in rapt contemplation of the beauty of the scene, for beautiful indeed it was ! Barnslade, with its smoke and chimneys was now behind them, while in front the Card wound its way through smiling meads and pastures, and under drooping willows, that kissed its ripples as they danced along, and gently inclined their heads, moved by the light summer breeze that whispered amidst their spreading leaves. In the west the dying sun was taking his last peep over the *heather hills* at the fair scene, giving everything a purple tinge that seemed reflected in the heaven. Only the one great Painter, the immortal Artist Creator of earth and man, could produce such a picture as this—it **testified** in silence more eloquent than speech to the power and goodness of Him who has given us the breath of life, and formed such a bright and beautiful world for us to live in !

Some little time elapsed before either Warner or Mona

spoke a word. The former sculling gently, for the stream would have carried them along without any exertion on his part, was as much entranced as his companion, who with her hat off, her long golden hair hanging shaggily over her shoulders, and her hands clasped on her knee, sat as one in a dream.

"Little lady," said Warner, suddenly, as the roar of the weir got almost deafening, on their rounding a curve in the river, "we're close to your meadow; where shall I pull the boat in?"

Mona started, and rubbed her eyes; for a moment she hardly knew where she was, and then recollecting herself, she pointed out the spot where she wanted to land. Warner pulled in that direction, and while he is so engaged I must digress for a moment to describe the locality.

The meadow in which the wild strawberries grew was some fifty yards above the weir, which lay in front of the pretty little village of Dedenham. Adjoining the weir there was a lock, not one of your new-fashioned highly artistic contrivances that are to be found in these days, but a regular clumsy, awkward affair of the old school, which took no end of time to get into operation, and made the bargees, whose craft had to pass through it, use language that was anything but classical. The weir itself was a rough-and-ready sort of contrivance, though on the particular day when we pay it a visit, most of it was hidden in the froth and foam of the swift rushing water that hurried and tumbled in wild confusion over the huge boulders and stout wooden stakes of which it

was composed. Like gigantic stepping-stones three of these same boulders raised their heads above the stream, and in fine weather more than one of the more daring of the Dedenham boys had crossed the river by this strange bridge. But in the present state of the waters they would have thought twice before attempting such a feat, for the strongest swimmer in the world would have had no chance in the eddying whirlpool below, that twisted and twirled round and round in a dance that to him would have been one of death.

Warner made the boat fast to a branch that extended over the water from an old tree stump, and then jumping out, helped his young charge, who did not find the riding habit in which she was attired altogether conducive to comfortable locomotion. But she was soon out in the meadow, scampering away as fast as she could to where the wild strawberries grew, and next was down on her knees busy plucking them.

"Come, little lady," said Warner, calling out to her when more than half an hour had been expended in this way, and it was beginning to get chilly, "it's high time we made our way back, for it's getting cold, and it will be dusk before we reach Barnslade."

Mona came running to him without a murmur; she was grateful to him for his kindness in having brought her, and wished to show him that she was.

"I'll be into the boat before you," she panted out, and rushing past him, jumped from the bank into the boat. It was a foolish, childish act, and was followed by terrible consequences. The boat gave a sudden

lurch, and before Mona could recover herself she was thrown out into the river, and the stream catching her tiny form as it would a cork, hurried it on towards the weir and—death. Warner never paused a moment, but flinging off his coat plunged into the waters, and by dint of a few powerful strokes reached the child's side and grasped her by the hair. But when he had done that he had accomplished all that man could, as he himself knew in an instant when he tried to breast the remorseless current in whose hands he was as powerless as an autumn leaf. He felt that in a few brief moments his strength would be exhausted in battling with it, and then——. Not of himself did he think, but of the helpless child who clinging round his neck rent the air with her wild shrieks.

Two boys were lounging idly in a meadow that adjoined the weir, when they were startled by hearing cries of distress proceeding from the river; and running up to the bank they saw a man struggling madly in the stream with a little girl clinging to him, fighting desperately for life against fearful odds. Quicker than thought, the younger of these two boys caught sight of a rope that lay coiled at the side of the weir, which was fastened securely to an iron ring, and was used to secure the dredgers when they were at work there. It was stout and strong, and of considerable length; if he could only throw it within reach of the drowning man before the stream carried him over the weir into the hissing, whirling waters below, there was yet hope! But the rope was heavy, and neither boy had strength to cast it.

"It's no use waiting," replied the younger one, "and wasting time. If I could only get on that big bit of rock out there, the stream will carry them close over by it."

"But it's impossible," replied the other; "you'll only go and get drowned yourself."

The younger boy looking upward, saw that one of the branches of the willow above his head hung over the river as far as the rock of which he had spoken, and that if he could clamber to the end of it he might be able to drop down on the spot he wanted to reach. There was no hesitation, for in a moment more he had tied the rope round his waist, and was up in the willow tree and out on the branch, scrambling eagerly along. It was indeed a race for life; the efforts of the man in the water were growing feeble, and the pitiless stream was slowly but surely conquering him, and he was drawing nearer, with his now unconscious burden, to the weir. Suddenly his ears were greeted by a shout coming right from the centre of the river, and turning his glazed eyes in that direction, he saw standing on one of the boulders mid-stream a little boy with a rope in his hand, making signs to him, and calling out something to him that he could not hear. Beaten and exhausted now he was borne helplessly along, and in a few moments was abreast the boulder. He felt something fall across his face, and catching at it with drowning eagerness, held fast to it. In another instant he and Mona must have been swept over the sea into the basin below!

But they were saved, for Warner clung to the rope that had been thrown to him, and by this time one of

the Dedenham boatmen had put off, and creeping up in his boat along shore, managed to lay hold of Warner and drag him and the child in. It was a near thing; assuredly they were saved by the "skin of the teeth!" The little boy, who stood on the boulder and threw the rope to which they owed their preservation, was no other than our hero, Oliver!





CHAPTER X.

THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

FT would be difficult to describe the feelings of all those who figured in the last chapter, when, after the danger was passed and Mona had been restored to consciousness, they found themselves sitting in the parlour of the boatman's cottage, waiting the arrival of a conveyance that had been sent for to carry them back to Barnslade. Warner seemed quite at home in the suit of rough clothes that had been lent him, while Mona, thoroughly recovered, was laughing and joking with the good woman of the house, who had rigged her out in a nondescript sort of costume, made up of contributions from the wardrobe of each member of her own juvenile family, some of which were not a little the worse for wear.

Warner seemed more subdued and silent than ever, while his eyes wandered dreamily to Oliver, who was standing at the open window, gazing out at the river, that looked so dark and silent in the gloaming.

"Come here, lad," murmured Warner gently to him, and he, turning quickly on his heel, crossed the room and came to his side. "You have done a deed to-day," Warner continued, putting his hand on Oliver's head, as if blessing him, like the patriarchs of old, "that hereafter when your hair is white, and your eyes are dim and feeble, will make your heart beat proudly within you. Aye, lad, when I am no longer to the fore, and you have grown to be a big man, remember that William Warner prayed God to prosper and bless you."

"And I, too, pray the same," interrupted Mona, rushing to Oliver's side, and seizing his hand. "As long as I live I shall never forget you, never, never, never!" And with that she threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him; and then, as if abashed at her own temerity, hung her head and blushed till her face was suffused with a bright crimson colour.

But the vow she then made was kept faithfully to the end, and never broken even so much as in thought!

It was quite dark when the lumbering old carriage, in which Warner, Mona, Oliver and Jerry, for he was Oliver's companion in the meadow by the weir, had started for Barnslade, made its way up to Mr. Lloyd's front door. That worthy gentleman had been greatly distressed and frightened by his dear little daughter's prolonged absence, and had been sending messengers in all directions to find out whither she had gone. When everything had been explained to him, and he learned how nearly he had lost the dearest thing to him on earth, he was quite overpowered by his feelings, and embraced

everybody all round, not excepting the fly-driver, who, with every respect for the feelings of a parent, had no idea of being done out of the "*pour boire*," as to the amount of which he had been calculating from the moment of starting. It is needless to say that when Mr. Lloyd was calmer he did not neglect to thank either Warner or Oliver, or to show how deeply he appreciated the obligation he felt himself to be under to both of them.

"You are in the factory, boy, I understand from my good friend Warner," he said to Oliver, shaking him warmly by the hand. "Between now and to-morrow I will see if I cannot think of something for you to do about the counting-house; I dare say you will like that better."

Oliver, who was quite overcome by the grand house and the praises that had been bestowed upon him, murmured a reply in the affirmative, and was not sorry when he found himself out in the open air, walking by the side of William Warner. But Mona had not allowed him to go without first reiterating her thanks, and giving him a little locket off her dainty watch chain, saying at the same time, that "she hoped he would always keep it for her sake."

I dare say my readers will think it strange that Oliver, with so much courage and self-reliance in his disposition, had not before this either exposed George Brownlow's conduct or availed himself of his opportunities to fly from Barnslade back to London. But though his nature was equal to an emergency, he had been so cowed and

terrified by Brownlow that the idea had never entered his brain of setting him at defiance, and exposing him. Moreover the young are fond of change, and though he remembered Sam and Janet and Aunt Sally, with the tenderest affection, there was not a little variety in his life at the factory, and what with new faces, new companions, and an entirely novel occupation, he was not altogether dissatisfied with his position. But the sight of Mona had brought back Janet forcibly to his mind, and as he walked along with Warner, the desire was strong upon him to see her again. More than once he determined to tell his companion everything, and ask his assistance; but then there came before him the vision of George Brownlow, and in his ears rang the threats that had been used to him—terrible threats of what would happen to him if he ever breathed a word as to how he had been brought to Barnslade.

"Bless my heart, lad," said Warner, suddenly breaking the silence, which had been prolonged till they nearly reached the gate of the house where he lived, "I never thought to ask you where you lodged."

"I'm with George Brownlow, in Mill Lane," replied our hero.

"George Brownlow?" echoed Warner, the lines on his face getting deeper and deeper, and a strange look lighting up his eyes. "How came you there, boy? its bad company you've got into. Come in here with me, lad," he added, opening the gate, and passing up the walk to the door of his lodgings, "and have a bit of supper, and I'll take you on to Brownlow's afterwards.

It's time, he murmured to himself, that that trade of his was broken up."

It required but little encouragement on Warner's part for him to learn Oliver's history, of how he had been stolen from school, and brought to Barnslade. More than once while the boy was telling his story he gazed affrightedly at the open window, fancying he saw Brownlow's face there, the eyes glaring at him with the fury of a wild beast. But he turned to Warner, and there was something in his countenance that seemed to engender confidence; and so, between mouthfuls of bread and cheese he brought his tale to a conclusion.

"And I can do nothing," said Warner, still murmuring to himself; "I am powerless to unmask him as this child; helpless and fettered." And with that he struck his hand on the mantelpiece so roughly that the blood came. But he never winced nor showed a sign of pain; only his teeth were clenched, and his lips set tightly together. "No," he continued, rising suddenly from his chair with a dangerously defiant expression in his eyes, "I will be a coward no longer. Come what may I will be even with him to-night. This boy has taught me to have courage."

Oliver, who was very busily engaged with his knife and fork, was somewhat surprised to see his host muttering so strangely to himself, and walking up and down the room in which they were sitting as if his supper had not agreed with him. But our hero's appetite was good, and the fare provided for him was so much superior to that supplied in George Brownlow's

establishment that he had no idea of not doing full justice to it. It was getting late when he and Warner reached the door of the house in Mill Lane, and knocked for admission ; it was opened by the worthy tenant himself, who, the moment he saw Oliver standing on the step, seized him by the collar, and dragging him in, said with a curse, "Get to bed, you young varmint ! I'll talk to you to-morrow for this, don't you make no mistake !" Oliver did not delay, but made the best of his way up to the bare room in which Jerry and the Cripple were fast asleep, and in his turn he had soon forgotten everything in the arms of "nature's soft nurse."

As for Warner, he placed his hand against the door, which Brownlow held, and pushing it back entered.

"Listen to me, George Brownlow," he said ; "to-night you and I come to an understanding. Whatever the result, I will be silent as to your doings no longer."

"Oh, indeed," jeered the other, insolently ; and then coolly closing the door, he went on ; "we shall see. But as I never like to keep a visitor standing, will you just take a step into my room, and then I dare say we can make matters square."

Warner mechanically followed him into the inner apartment, of which I have before spoken.

"All your audacity," he broke in fiercely, "cannot change my determination. Shame, exposure, disgrace, everything I will face rather than allow your infamous traffic to go on."

"Well, I'm blest if this isn't a rum start !" replied Brownlow, leisurely puffing his pipe, as if he were

engaged in the most common-place conversation ; "you must be wrong in your head, or something ; you couldn't be such a fool !"

"There's nothing wrong with my head," said Warner, "and unless you send that boy I brought back with me to-night to his friends, from whom you stole him, to-morrow I'll expose you to Mr. Lloyd, that I will, on my soul."

"Two can play at that game," answered Brownlow, as calmly as ever, "and it would be more dangerous for you than for me."

"I have thought of all that," said Warner, "of all the consequences. You may do your worst with me ; I can face it all."

"What, you don't mean to say you dare me to tell all I know ?" jeered Brownlow. "It ain't possible. You must be mad. All I know ?" he repeated.

"Yes, all you know," was the answer.

Brownlow gave a prolonged whistle, and followed his visitor, who had risen and gone in that direction, to the door.

"Do you mean it ?" inquired he of Warner.

"As surely as a day of retribution will come for you," was the reply.

Not another word—not a single look ; the die was cast, and was declared. The next morning Warner's landlady loudly asserted that if he was going to walk up and down his bedroom over her head another whole night through she would give him a week's notice to quit.



CHAPTER XI.

BY THE SEA.

AGAIN the scene changes as with the touch of a magician's wand, and this time to the shore of the great sea, where the pretty little fishing village of Herringbourne lies, snugly ensconced under the long range of chalk cliffs that east and west extend for miles. It was no resort for languid fashionables, tired with the empty gaieties of a town life. There was no band, no circulating library, no pier where fine dresses could be exhibited. Beyond the fishermen, their wives and families, the rector, the parish clerk, and the one policeman who guarded the interests of law and order —chiefly, by the way, in the taproom of "The Three Smugglers"—few persons were to be seen within its limits. Occasionally a stranger found his way there, but only to take his departure as suddenly as he had arrived, for dulness reigned supreme at Herringbourne, and it was absolutely impossible to find anything to do. Hither it was, however, that Uncle Oliver, who was fond of quaint, out-of-the way spots, brought Janet, after her

illness, to gain health and strength, and gather roses into her pale cheeks, and here they lingered many a long summer day wandering idly along the shore, or sitting on the sands by the hour together, engaged in pleasant converse. Uncle Oliver overflowed with anecdotes and stories of adventure, and was not chary of telling them ; and sometimes in the evenings the fishermen, too, would assemble round him and ask him to spin them a yarn, listening with the most undisguised delight and admiration when he acceded to their request. Right glad was the tough old sailor to have done with hard work : he had had his share of it in his day, sailing north, south, east, and west, and his hard hands and bronzed face plainly bespoke how rough it had been. But, my children, it is only those who toil and labour that are capable of thoroughly appreciating a holiday ; they alone can be moved by that glorious feeling of liberty which thrills divinely through the human frame when the ties and fetters of business have been abandoned for awhile, and its worn and weary slave is able to exclaim, “I am free—free to breathe the fresh, pure air of the country, away from men and cities ; free to look upward into the blue sky with an untroubled brain and tranquil mind.” But Uncle Oliver was in still better case, for he had given up work for good and all, and what with his previous savings, and the sum he had realised on the sale of the *Sweet William* and her cargo, had taken up his moorings in an exceedingly snug and comfortable harbour of rest, where he intended to lie up for the remainder of his days.



"They were idling away the afternoon, resting on an old boat that was a highly-favoured seat of theirs."

"Lass," said he to Janet one day, as they were idling away the afternoon, resting on an old boat that was a highly-favoured seat of theirs, and which, turned bottom upwards, looked much like a walnut-shell under like circumstances, "I've been thinking and thinking about that little chap Oliver, who was called after me; and, look here, if you ain't tired of your old uncle, we'll see if we cannot ferret him out somehow or other. Bless the lad, he must be a right good sort for my Jinney to be so fond of him."

"Good! Uncle Oliver," responded Janet, enthusiastically; "he was a great deal better than good——"

"Now look here, young lady," interrupted Uncle Oliver, with a merry look on his face, "just let me remind you that I am your young man at the present moment, and that you've taken me for better for worse. Now as the young gentleman, about whom you are pleased to express yourself so warmly, is single, and no relation of yours, and therefore eligible for your hand and heart, unless you are desirous of seeing me fling myself into the sea with despair, you will be pleased to withdraw all your previous observations in his favour, and pronounce him to be an impostor."

"I won't do anything of the sort," laughed Janet, merrily, in reply. "Fling yourself into the sea with despair if you like, only give me time to run up to the lodgings and get a couple of nice dry towels and a change of clothing when you come out."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Uncle Oliver, in a fashion that would have startled any ordinary individual unac-

customed to his style of laughing ; " What a girl it is to be sure !" and then, as if making an extempore address to the sea and inviting its opinion, he went on, " Ain't she a wonderful girl to be sure ? It would take a clever one to get to the windward of her in talking ; she's like my old dog Pincher, she's always jumping out and laying hold of you when you least expect it. Hullo, who's that ?" he added, turning sharply round as he felt a hand placed upon his shoulder, and then bounding to his feet as he found standing by his side a tall, ladylike woman, dressed in deep black, who was gazing at Janet with evident interest. " Beg your pardon, ma'am," he continued, taking off his hat, " but I wasn't aware you were near me, and for the moment you made me feel all of a creep."

" Pray forgive me," responded the strange woman, in a soft and melodious voice, " but I have seen you and your daughter——"

" Niece," corrected Uncle Oliver.

" Niece," continued the lady, with an inclination of her head ; " so often in the course of my daily walks here, that your faces have become to me like those of old friends. Your niece, sir," she went on speaking more immediately to Uncle Oliver, " has completely won my heart, and I could not resist the desire within me to know her and speak to her. I am sure when I have said this you will pardon the liberty I might otherwise seem to be taking."

" Liberty, ma'am," replied the old sailor, heartily, " it's no liberty that I'm aware of ; this place ain't over

and above crowded with visitors, and I don't see how there's any harm for the few there is in it to hobnob and be friendly together."

It was not very long before the strange lady was sitting at Janet's side on the old boat, chatting away as if she had known her for years. She was one of those quiet, engaging women who win their way to love and confidence by tenderness and sympathy. There was a gentle, soothing manner with her which touched Janet to the heart, and seemed to draw them so nearly to one another. As for Uncle Oliver, he began to think that worse things might have happened than this *rencontre* with an extremely conversational and equally nice-looking woman, nor did he neglect to give his hair a bit of a slick up on the sly, as he was pleased to call a process which consisted in twisting his scanty locks into a cork-screw-shape.

"My name," said the lady, after Uncle Oliver had duly introduced Janet and himself, "is Mortimer, and, like yourselves, I have come here for quiet and rest. The former I have found in perfection, but the latter I fear I shall never know again. Never, never," she added with a sigh; would that I could pluck memory from me and fling it into the sea."

"But surely, madam," returned Janet in her own gentle way; "one like yourself can have nothing but pleasant things to recollect."

"Pleasant things!" responded the strange woman, with a harsh grating laugh, that sounded strangely discordant after the soft and subdued way in which she had

been speaking, "very pleasant things, my child, things that make my cheek flush with shame when I think of them—things that make me the outcast and wanderer I am."

As she uttered these words her eyes flashed, her lips quivered, and the whole aspect of her face was changed; she rose hastily and walked a few steps away, as if to calm herself, and when she returned, the wild look had departed, and she was perfectly at peace again. Janet had not, of course, been able to see the alteration in her expression, but her sensitive nature told her that she had awakened unpleasant memories, and she felt grieved and pained within herself.

When the strange woman seated herself once again, she took hold of Janet's hand, and caressing it with her own was soon talking away pleasantly to her, while Uncle Oliver amused himself by listening. And thus they wiled away the time in friendly converse till the fishing-boats came trooping back from their day's work, and the hands of the church clock told that it was close on six. It was a beautiful sight to see the tiny fleet making its way homeward, the larger boats coming to anchor at a safe distance from the shore, while the smaller ones hustled up to the verge of the beach to be hauled up on to *terra firma*.

"A sight such as that is good for sore eyes, ma'am," said Uncle Oliver addressing the stranger, "it does one's heart good, more especially one like myself, as has had to do with the sea, man and boy, this forty years."

"You are right," was the answer, "you cannot love

the sea better than I do. It has been my best and truest companion, one that I have talked and listened to in my lonely life more than any other. What is the matter my child?" she said, suddenly noticing two big tears stealing down Janet's face; "what has distressed you?"

There was silence for a few moments, which was broken by Janet.

"I am not distressed, thank you, ma'am," she said, "but when I hear Uncle Oliver and you talk of all these beautiful things which I cannot see, it makes me sad. I know it is wrong and childish of me, but I cannot help it, it is so terrible to be as I am," and the child buried her face in her hands and sobbed. And then she felt an arm put round her, and her head drawn gently till it rested near to a beating heart, while a kindly voice whispered words of comfort to her. Uncle Oliver thought proper to take himself off for a few minutes, and whether he had been suddenly seized with a very bad cold I know not, but certain it is that for some moments he kept blowing his nose very violently, and rubbing his eyes in a very mysterious style. When he had sufficiently recovered himself to be able to return, he found Janet and Mrs. Mortimer, as I may as well henceforth call her, sitting in precisely the same position. A stranger in passing would have thought it was mother and child, so closely entwined was the one in the other's embrace. It was a curious but touching picture, that desolate sorrowing woman clasping a stranger's child to her bosom on the sea-shore. And as she did so her thoughts

flew back to her own bright bonny baby boy, into whose shining face she had looked in happy times, and dreamed, and schemed, and planned what he would be in days to come, and how proud she and his father would be of him. His father—the very word stuck in her throat and choked her, for it reminded her of horror and misery she would fain forget. The sins of the father shall be visited on the children, echoed the preacher in her ear! No, not as God is good, is merciful, is just, not as He metes unto every man according to his works, shall this ominous prophecy of woe be fulfilled upon her little one! Thus from morning until night went her prayers upward. And he, the child, in a new sphere of life so different in all respects from that in which he had been brought up in earliest days, away from her, from everything to connect him with a shameful past, or to engage the gossip of idle tongues to search after his antecedents, might live honourable and respected, ignorant of the dark cloud that shrouded his babyhood. She had separated him from her, many years had passed since last she saw him, years that seemed like centuries, years that had made her long for the grave to be at rest. But she had courage, she had strength, she had laid out for herself the path along which she was to journey, and rough, bitter though it was, no apostle or martyr was ever more faithful than she to the penance she had imposed upon herself. What wonder then that with all a mother's love and tenderness of heart, her soul had yearned towards the blind girl. Oh! for something to pet, to cherish, to show that all humanity is not dead within me, to hold in

my arms as I would my own child ! Such was her weary wail, and now she had at last found a solace. For Janet, soothed by her affectionate sympathy, drew herself even closer to Mrs. Mortimer than before, and rested her head gratefully upon her breast. And the tiny waves fell upon the sands with that gentle jangling melody we all so well know, while these two new-made friends, uttering no word, cemented their acquaintance in the magic language of silence.

"It's tea-time," said Uncle Oliver, his appetite getting the better of his patience, "and you know, Janet, we've ordered muffins."

From the sublime to the ridiculous ! But it is a good thing that there are some matter-of-fact people in this world of ours !





CHAPTER XII.

A REVELATION.

MR. LLOYD sat in his breakfast-room reading the newspaper that had arrived by the morning's post. It was the day succeeding that on which Mona had so nearly lost her life, and he was thinking a great deal more about her than of the contents of the printed sheet he held in his hand. Mr. Lloyd was a thoroughly good Christian man ; there was no cant or humbug about him, no vain and empty professions of religion ; but into business and pleasure alike he carried an implicit faith in God's goodness, and was "not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." He could not help feeling more than ever, on this particular morning, how Providence had spared his darling child to him, and how thankful he ought to be. "God, I thank Thee," he murmured to himself, with an earnestness to be appreciated none the less, because he was not upon his knees. And I, my children, dare to hold that genuflexions and long prayers, and

thanksgivings, are but poor performances of themselves ; and that it is far better in the hurry and bustle of life, in the midst of men and business, to be able to utter a few sincere words of entreaty or gratefulness, which spring from that best of all human sources—the heart.

The very first thing Mr. Lloyd had sent a message to the factory, desiring that our hero should come up to see him at nine o'clock, and it was now close upon that hour. The lad was so very young that it was difficult to know what he could do for him ; perhaps the kindest thing would be to send him to school ; yes, the idea was a good one, and he would see about carrying it into effect ! As he came to this conclusion, the servant opened the door and showed Oliver in.

"Come here, my boy," said Mr. Lloyd, holding out his hand and smiling pleasantly, and in a way that put our hero completely at his ease. "I hope you did not think me ungrateful in not expressing to you last night more warmly how much I thank you. You are very young, but you have begun early in life to show stuff out of which great men are made, and anything I can do to help you on will be a labour of love to me."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Oliver, stammering out his gratitude, and blushing, "I hope the little girl, Miss Mona, is quite well."

"She has caught a slight cold, but nothing more," replied Mr. Lloyd ; and then suddenly remembering he was quite ignorant of our hero's name, he added, "And now you must tell me what your name is ?"

Almost at the moment he uttered these words, and before Oliver could reply, a man appeared at the French window that opened out of the breakfast-room into the garden. It was George Brownlow. Doffing his hat, he respectfully inquired whether he might come in, as he had something of importance to communicate. Mr. Lloyd, who never allowed anything to interfere with business, and conceiving that something connected with the factory had brought Brownlow to him, at once desired him to enter.

"What! are you here, lad?" remarked Brownlow in honeyed tones, and with a hypocritical smile on his face; "I've been a looking for you. I couldn't make out where you had got to, not turning up at breakfast!"

"Oh, you know the lad, then," inquired Mr. Lloyd, "I'm glad of that, as I am anxious to be of service to him?"

"Know him, sir," was the answer; "Bless you, yes, he's been with me these four years."

Oliver would have taken exception to this statement, but Brownlow, who to all outward appearances had an affectionate hold of him by the arm, gave him a pinch, which commanded silence.

"And," continued he, there ain't a better lad in Barnslade than Jemmy."

Oliver would have remonstrated at the Jemmy, but the remorseless fingers made themselves felt again.

"I am glad to hear that," observed Mr. Lloyd, "and I feel sure he deserves all you say; and as you, Brownlow, seem to know so much about him, and to take an

interest in him, we will see if we can't arrange something satisfactory for him. But, first, what has brought you here?"

"Something very private and particular, sir; something for you only to hear, sir," answered Brownlow, giving Oliver's arm a parting squeeze as he added, "just you go into the garden, Jemmy, dear. Little pitchers have ears," he went on, turning apologetically to Mr. Lloyd, "and in this what I'm going to tell you, sir, I don't want to run no risks."

Oliver did not hesitate to avail himself of the opportunity thus afforded him, but made his way out into the garden as directed. Now I do not want to make too much of a man of my hero, nor to paint him a paragon of perfection in jackets; but Aunt Sally and Sam between them had brought him forward, and he had a great deal more judgment and discretion than most boys of his age. Perhaps he was a trifle inconsistent. Probably you and I, reader, if we had been kidnapped in the way he was, should have availed ourselves of the first chance afforded us to run away, and have done our best to get back home again. But in this respect Oliver unquestionably was wanting; Brownlow had from the first exercised an influence over him that seemed completely to paralyze him, and he found himself utterly incapable of exercising a will of his own. He was held prisoner by some magnetic influence more powerful than adamantine chains, and the mere thought of taking flight, when it had occurred to him, he had scouted as a thing impossible to accomplish. But as he stepped out

of Mr. Lloyd's breakfast-room into the garden he could not resist certain suspicions that had been engendered by Brownlow's altogether unaccountable demeanour. Soft words and kind expressions were so inconsistent with his ordinary manner, that Oliver felt that on the present occasion they must be due to some mysterious cause, wholly inexplicable to him. His curiosity was aroused, he came suddenly to a stand, and reflected. He had heard high words the night before between William Warner and Brownlow; could it be that they had quarrelled, and that the visit of the latter to Mr. Lloyd owed its origin to this. Eaves-dropping was a contemptible business, but Warner had spoken kindly to him, had treated him well, and Oliver never forgot such things. Turning on his heel he crept back to the side of the window, and crouching down in the thick ivy that fringed it, set himself to the task of listening. And amid the soft rustle of the leaves about him, he heard the coward and villain dexterously weaving his web around the head of the man he had sworn to be before-hand with and to destroy. But retribution was to begin from this hour; fate, that had favoured his evil schemes so long, had turned against him, and henceforth, slowly but surely, inevitable justice would be vindicated. Little did Oliver think, as motionless and with bated breath he listened outside to the conversation going on within, that the day would come when he would bless the impulse that made him play the listener.

"I have no self-interest to serve, sir," he heard

Brownlow remark. "I am only doing what I holds to be my duty ; putting my employer on his guard against people as has no other object than to take him in."

"That is quite enough," interrupted Mr. Lloyd, sharply, "I have no doubt your motives are all that they should be, and when the time arrives for me to reward them I shall know how to appreciate them at their proper value."

"It ain't for any reward," broke in Brownlow, in a tone of well-assumed virtuous indignation, "it's because I've kept something to myself too long ; because I've allowed you, sir, to be duped without opening my mouth as I ought to have done."

"Pray spare all this preliminary flourish," remarked Mr. Lloyd, more sharply than before, "and come to the point at once. What is it that you have to tell me ?"

If Oliver could have caught sight of Brownlow's face at that moment, he would have seen an angry flush upon the cheek, and a dangerous expression in the eye. He did not like being received in this arbitrary fashion, when he had come to do his master a good turn, as he was pleased to call it ; and for an instant his lips quivered with suppressed passion, but he had too much control over himself to allow it to be observed, and he was perfectly calm as he replied,

"Well, sir, what I have to tell you is that the man William Warner, whom you hold in such high estimation, is nothing more than——."

"Enough, sir," interrupted Mr. Lloyd in an angry tone ; I have heard quite sufficient. It is not the first

time insinuations have been made against Warner, probably because I respect and trust him, and have thought proper to place him in a position of confidence in my employ. I have, therefore, only to wish you good morning."

"Oh, very well, sir," answered Brownlow, not in the least disconcerted; "if you thinks proper to retain a convicted thief in your service it is no affair of mine; only such a thing might set people a talking."

With that Brownlow rose from the chair on which he had been sitting, and essayed to go; but Mr. Lloyd, whose face had turned deathly pale, seized him by the arm.

"A convicted thief! Warner a convicted thief, did you say?" he gasped—"impossible."

"It may seem impossible, but it's true; and what's more, he can't deny it. You ask him how oakum picking suited his fingers, and see what he'll say. Don't you make no mistake, Bill Warner knows what the inside of a prison is like."

As he uttered these words Brownlow's face literally shone with diabolical pleasure. As for Mr. Lloyd, he had sunk into the nearest chair, overcome with his emotions. When he had taken Warner into his service he knew that he had been poor and out of employ, but to think that he had come straight from a gaol with the shadow of a crime heavy on him, was more than he could bear! Could it be true? might there not be some mistake? After all, what security had he that his informant might not be in error. He raised his eyes and

looked at Brownlow, who was gazing out of the window in the direction of the gate that led from the road into the garden.

"What proof have I," enquired Mr. Lloyd, "that your assertion is correct? It is possible that you have been misinformed."

"It ain't possible," replied Brownlow, roughly; he had played his cards well, and he saw that he had won. "Not a bit possible! If you want evidence, here it is." With that he put his hand into his pocket and drew out some papers. One among them he did not seem to want, as his face flushed when he saw it, and he hurriedly thrust it by itself into the side pocket of his coat. "Read that, sir," he said, handing a long slip of paper; "that's the report of his trial."

"But the name is different," observed Mr. Lloyd, as he turned his eyes to the top of the document.

"Lor,' sir, how jolly innocent you must be," said Brownlow. "It ain't very likely that a chap as has been convicted, would care about sticking to the name he was tried in. He would be a fool if he did!"

"True, true," murmured Mr. Lloyd, his eyes travelling down the printed column, and the fact that Brownlow was correct becoming plainer to him and more certain with each word.

"And now, sir," said Brownlow, after a lengthened pause; "there ain't no occasion for me to stop any longer, so I'll take my leave, and I'm sure, sir, you'll think I've only done my duty. Duty before everything, say I!"

"You can go," responded Mr. Lloyd coldly.

"Thank you, sir, good morning," replied Brownlow jauntily, determined not to be put down or put out; and then with a triumphant smile on his face, he passed out by the window, and so near to Oliver, that our hero could feel his hot breath on his face. As he went by him he happened to take his pocket handkerchief out of his pocket, and as he did so the small paper came with it that he had been so anxious to conceal from Mr. Lloyd, and fell unnoticed by him on the ground. When he was out of sight, Oliver emerged from his hiding-place and secured it, and then made the best of his way to find William Warner, and to inform him of what had transpired between Brownlow and Mr. Lloyd.

As for Brownlow, he went back to work at the factory, and he was more chatty and agreeable than he had been for many a long day; in fact, more than one of the work-people declared that he must have had a stroke of luck. Was it luck, as he thought it, or had he put the first nail in his own coffin? We shall see!





CHAPTER XIII.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

HE story that Oliver came breathless and excited to tell him, was listened to by Warner with little or no exhibition of emotion. The reflections and resolves of the past night of sleeplessness and trial had made him strong, and he was fully prepared to face the worst, however terrible and degrading that worst might be. As the hunted-down deer turns his head to the greedy hounds, making one last and desperate struggle for life, so this man, worn out with his slavery to a tyrant who had shown him neither pity nor mercy, had now determined to throw off the odious yoke he had borne patiently so long, and to defy him to the death. He could not help being struck by the strange fatuity that had imported Oliver into the drama of his existence, the climax of which was now approaching. Odd enough that this mere boy should have preserved his life by an act of daring that any man might have been proud of, more curious still that yet a second time

he should be able to give Warner information, the value of which was incalculable. Without interruption, though not altogether unmoved by the heightened colour of the lad, and the boyish jumble and confusion of his words, he heard Oliver's tale, which made it perfectly plain to him that there was no hope of Brownlow's sparing him now, and that already his enemy had got the better of him by striking the first blow. There was one thing, William Warner knew his foe well; that he was remorseless, heartless, unscrupulous; that he would pause at nothing, condescend to anything to gain the upper hand. He had lived by crime and infamy till now, he would live by crime and villainy to the end. Perchance from this day, from this hour, slowly but surely the tide may set in against him; likely enough the stream of success, upon whose bosom he has floated so long, will turn round and hurry him as quickly to destruction! Be sure your sin, sooner or later, will find you out; will leave you stranded high and dry, a spectacle for passers-by to point at, a sign-post to warn travellers along life's highway.

"And so," said Oliver, bringing his history of the interview between Brownlow and Mr. Lloyd to a conclusion, "I waited till he got out of sight, and then ran off here as fast as I could."

"You were quite right," responded Warner, patting our hero on the head, "and I am very much obliged to you." "Then," he continued in the same tone, but talking to himself, "the die is cast, and I must meet my fate, whatever it be. Courage, courage. I have played the craven too long!"

Oliver gazed inquiringly at Warner, and was much mystified by these words ; for though he was quite aware, from what he had heard, that Brownlow was seeking to do his new friend an injury, he was yet unable thoroughly to appreciate the precise position of affairs ; but his looks met with no response from Warner, who had crossed to the window, and, with his head resting on his hand, seemed buried in thought.

“By the way,” said Warner, suddenly awaking from his reverie, “you said that Brownlow, as he passed you, dropped a little piece of paper ; where is it ?”

“Here,” was the reply, and in a moment more it was placed in Warner’s hands. It was after all but a tiny scrap, folded up three-corner fashion, and none the cleaner for having been taken care of in what Brownlow held to be the safest receptacle—the breast pocket of his coat. Why he ever kept it so carefully hereafter may appear strange ; probably impelled by one of those unaccountable eccentricities of roguery, whose very cleverness is their own pitfall. Warner took the paper carelessly at first, but when he had untwisted it, and cast his eye upon the written characters, a flush rose upon his cheek, and a light started in his eye, that told there was something startling in their meaning. It was wonderful to remark the change that came over him ; how his head was set more erect, how his whole frame seemed braced up with unwonted energy ; in short, how some mysterious agency had worked a marvellous revolution in his appearance. As for Oliver, to whom the contents of the paper were unknown, he was more completely mystified

than ever, and began to be exceedingly curious as to what everything meant.

Now I feel that if I were not to tell my readers what was contained in the document which had had such an effect upon Warner, I should have no end of my young people calling out and exclaiming, "Oh ! Mr. Storyteller, what a nasty, tiresome, disagreeable old thing you are. You make such a fuss about a dirty little piece of paper, fancying you will set us by the ears to know what is written upon it, and then, when we think you are going to tell us, you turn round and disappoint us." But, my dear children, I will not give you the opportunity to say this of me. I will tell you what the dirty little piece of paper contained, and try for once not to be a nasty, tiresome, disagreeable old thing ! The writing upon it was as if the hand that had held the pen had shaken violently in its course over the clean sheet. The letters were straggling, indistinct, and in more than one instance almost illegible. It was as if their author had sought to leave behind him irresistible evidence of agony of mind and despair at the time they were created. This was its tenour :—

"Plymouth, Jan. 1st, 18—.

"DEAR GEORGE,

"I have got safely down here, and shall sail to-night in the *Marco Polo* for Sydney, whence you shall hear from me. I think it best to keep out of the way for a year or two, till things have quieted down a bit. Mr. Robson has been told by the doctor that it will do my health good to have a voyage out to Australia and

back, and he has given me leave to be away as long as I like. Therefore he can't suspect anything, and I don't see how Mordaunt can get out of it, at least if you are true, and Charlotte holds her tongue. Curses on her meddling, that let her know anything about it, and now she's always going on so about her baby, that sometimes I think she'll go crazy, and come out with the whole affair. One thing is certain, you've got the money, and safe enough, I'll warrant. Write home when the trial is over, and let me know all about it. It's not a pleasant thing to think of, but what's done can't be undone. When you have read this, burn it, as it is a dangerous thing to have letters of this sort about. Good bye. I hope, when we next meet, that you'll be flourishing, and Mordaunt *comfortably* disposed of.

“Yours ever,

“GEORGE BLUNDELL.”

As Warner came to the word *comfortably* he clenched his teeth till the veins in his forehead stood out hard and knotted, while he muttered, in a voice that sounded much as the hiss of the cobra before it darts upon its prey, “Comfortable! Aye, so comfortable, that all I hope, I pray for, is to live to be able to make you taste of such comforts. This is well, very well,” he continued, gazing again at the writing on the paper, which he then carefully folded up and put in his pocket. “A change has come at last; the game is not so much all one way as it has been. You, my boy,” he added, suddenly turning to Oliver, “will promise me, I know, not to say one word

either about this paper or the conversation which you overheard between Brownlow and Mr. Lloyd. When I tell you that my fate, my very life, depends upon your silence, I feel certain I shall not make this request in vain."

Oliver was in a state of utter bewilderment, and was not quite sure whether he was standing upon his head or his heels; still he had sense enough left to promise obedience to Warner's wish.

"Above all things," continued the latter, "do not let Brownlow in the least suppose that you are aware of how he and I are situated as regards one another. In short, feign absolute ignorance of everything connected with this matter."

"You may be sure of that," replied Oliver, and the statement came from his heart, for he was beginning to appreciate the fact that the man, of whom he had stood in such awe, and whose harsh words and blows had made his life at Barnslade but sorry work, was not to have it all his own way.

"For the present," said Warner, taking up his hat and moving towards the door, "we must say good bye, though not for long. Perhaps a day may come when I shall have it in my power to reward you, my boy, for all you have done."

William Warner said no more, but passed quickly into the street, and bent his steps towards Mr. Lloyd's house with a briskness of manner and airiness of gait that attracted the notice of more than one of those he met on his way, who had hitherto known him by the slow and

stooping fashion in which he was wont to walk. But he was an altered man now ; he was not afraid to face his employer, to tell him the plain unvarnished truth, and lay bare to him the secret of his life. Hitherto the prospect of refuting the calumny that had been whispered to Mr. Lloyd, and doing battle with Brownlow on even terms, had been but a poor one, but now he carried with him corroborative evidence that no reasonable man could resist. And as he went along his heart expanded till it seemed well nigh bursting, when he felt that he might crush out the shadow of the past and bury it for ever. It had haunted him long enough, had dogged his footsteps till his very helplessness to grasp it by the throat, and prove that it was a base and cruel lie, drove him almost mad. His solemn asseverations had been jeered at before now, had met with insolent incredulity ; he might have been a raving lunatic for any effect they had produced ; he was a marked man, with an imprint upon him that intervening years had only deepened. He had struggled long and fiercely, with the energy of despair, to wipe it out ; had tried his utmost to live the shame down ; but whenever he met George Brownlow, and looked into his cold, passionless eyes, he felt how powerless he was, and shrank away sick at heart.

But there was no tremor about William Warner when he knocked at Mr. Lloyd's door, and inquired if his employer was at home. Strong in his own innocence, and confident in the impartiality of the man to whom he had come to disclose everything, his pulse beat as calmly and regularly as if he were doing no more than paying

one of his ordinary business visits, to discuss with his master the week's accounts, or to inform him as to the amount of money required to pay the wages of the factory hands. Mr. Lloyd was at home; indeed, he had not left the room in which the interview between himself and Brownlow had taken place. Nor had he much altered his position since his last visitor quitted him; leaning back in his arm-chair, with the slip of newspaper still lying on his knee, he was deep in reflection when Warner was ushered into his presence. For a moment he could not help being startled by the remarkable coincidence, as it seemed to him, that had brought his clerk there so quickly on the heels of his accuser. Could it be that he had come to declare the insinuation made against him to be a cruel and wicked falsehood? Yet this was impossible, for how should he know what had passed with Brownlow that morning? Still Mr. Lloyd could not help noticing the difference in Warner's manner, for although his attitude as he entered and bowed to his master was as respectful as ever, there was unquestionably something in it altogether different from his ordinary demeanour. Mr. Lloyd did not feel in a very comfortable position, and scarcely knew how to begin the conversation, being none the less embarrassed by the silence of his visitor, who evidently looked for him to make the commencement. At length, crushing up the newspaper slip in his hand, with a sigh that came from his heart of hearts, he said—

“I was about to send for you, Warner, as I had a matter of very grave importance I wished to see you

upon. To come to the point at once, it has been insinuated to me that ——”

“That I am a convicted thief, that I know what the inside of a prison is like,” interrupted Warner, with admirable calmness and self-possession; “I was perfectly aware that you had been so informed, and I have come here at once to put myself right in your eyes.”

“I am heartily glad of that,” responded Mr. Lloyd, in a genuine outburst of satisfaction. “I knew that it could not be true; I felt sure it was all a mistake. The very idea of your ever having been suspected of a robbery, and convicted of it, why, the notion is quite ridiculous.”

Warner neither changed colour nor altered his tone, as he continued, “The idea may seem absurd to you, sir, still I was not only suspected, but I was convicted, and in the name that appears upon the slip of newspaper that I saw in your hand when I came into the room.”

“Convicted!” gasped Mr. Lloyd, half rising from his chair, and then sinking back again, overcome with his emotion; “convicted! then it is true?”

“It was false, and I was not guilty,” replied Warner, “as I trust that the Almighty may be merciful to me, I swear to you I was not guilty, that another committed the crime for which I suffered.”

“Say no more,” murmured Mr. Lloyd in a broken voice, “but leave me; you have cruelly, shamefully deceived me.”

“Leave you, sir!” said Warner, bewildered, “leave

you without giving you any explanation! If you will hear me, I will prove to you that I was innocent."

"That would be impossible," answered Mr. Lloyd.

"But I have a written paper that will corroborate me," burst in Warner.

"All the written papers could make no difference; you had a fair trial, and the jury found you were guilty," responded Mr. Lloyd, motioning with his hand to the door. "You will understand that it is quite impossible for a convicted thief to stay longer in the counting-house of Bird and Lloyd. I will take care that your month's salary is paid in advance."

"O Mr. Lloyd!" gasped Warner, "you cannot be so unjust, you cannot forget my years of long and honest service. Had I been as guilty as you think me, surely I have atoned it now."

For a moment Mr. Lloyd wavered, the shaft had travelled home, and he hesitated as to whether he had not gone a little too far. Was he being just, or, under the idea that he was doing his duty as a man of business, had he not forgotten to be indulgent, as one in his high position could afford to be? But in an instant more he was himself again. "The less said on this unpleasant matter the better," he said, rising from his chair. "You have heard my determination, nothing can alter it."

"Enough, sir," answered Warner, controlling himself with an effort. "I came to you expecting to meet with consideration, and above all things a patient hearing. You have refused me both, and therefore there is nothing left for me to say."

The shadow of the past had descended upon him again, and was falling heavily around him as of old. Gloomy was his face, and deeper than ever the lines in his forehead as he passed out through the open window into the garden.

"Will no one ever believe me?" he groaned.

As he uttered these words, he felt a soft little hand put into his, and heard a gentle voice saying to him, "Yes, second papa, Mona will."





CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

FT was the evening of the day on which George Brownlow's evil work had prospered so much to his satisfaction. He sat in his own little room, for once paying no attention to the noise which the boys were making in the adjoining apartment; for, taking advantage of the exceedingly good temper in which he appeared to be, Jerry, Oliver, and the Cripple were engaged in high jinks, amusing themselves in certain remarkable athletic exercises, in which screams of laughter and frequent tumbles on the floor appeared to be the principal feature. Considering the tyrannical and arbitrary fashion in which the establishment in Mill Lane was ordinarily governed, the permission of this outburst of animal spirits by its juvenile members would have excited not only surprise, but suspicion, in the breasts of those to whom its lord and master was known. He had an implicit faith in the old strap-and-ruler theory of schoolmasters, in days that, thank goodness, are long

gone by, and believed that the only way to make boys obedient was to drub them into submission. For once, however, he let them do as they would, while he occupied himself in chuckling over the success of his machinations against Warner, and ever and anon he murmured to himself, with an exulting rub of the hands, "I told him two could play at that game, and that it would be more dangerous for him than for me. I didn't think the guv'nor would take to it so quick as he did, but I'm blessed if them people who's always talking about the beauties of charity and loving-kindness one toward another, ain't generally the readiest to come down hard upon their fellow creatures. What a fool that Warner is, to be sure ; why couldn't he let me alone? 'Live and let live' is my motto, but self-preservation comes afore ev'rything, and I always holds it to be best to get the first word."

Go on, George Brownlow ; think how mighty clever you have been ; pat yourself on the back for the good fellow that you are in your own estimation ; glory in having check-mated an adversary who had not the opportunity allowed him to practise a single move against you ; be thoroughly complacent in the gallant victory you have won, for, bloodless though it be, you have well nigh broken a heart as true and honest as ever beat in man's bosom. Make the most of this short time of triumph and exultation, for already the shadow of the future, and what it will bring upon you, is creeping, and creeping slowly, to your door ; already is inevitable retribution saddling the whirlwind, seated on whose wings

it will bear downward in one fell swoop to destroy you, even as now and before you have plotted and planned an innocent man's ruin. Nor pity nor remorse, passionless as the chair upon which you are seated, so shall inexorable fate spare you not one iota of the destiny it has carved out for you.

For no little time Brownlow sat thus idly musing, as good and bad men must occasionally do. Everything had gone well with him ; for one in his position, he had accumulated a considerable sum of money, a fact, by the way, which he took the greatest pains to conceal from everybody. So much so, indeed, that he was generally reckoned to be poor among the people at the factory. He made a great pretended show of spending money and living a fast life, but in reality his extravagances were trumpery in comparison with his earnings ; at heart he was a miser, and hoarded up every spare penny. To him no sight was so pleasant as the contemplation of the bank notes and sovereigns he had hidden away, and it was a frequent habit of his to regale his eyes with a view of them. To-night he was in such a mood, and, rising stealthily from his chair with a look round his room, he crossed to the fire-place, and, putting his hand on a little spot on the wall, pressed it, and as he did so a small door opened, discovering a cupboard, in which there was a cash box and a bundle of papers. Their hiding-place was an artfully devised one, and it would have been impossible for any one not acquainted with the secret spring to have discovered its whereabouts. There was a greedy glower in Brownlow's eyes as his hand

rested on the receptacle of his ill-gotten gains, no sign of remorse in them for the evil devices by which its contents had been gathered. What was it that made him suddenly start and turn pale? There was a gentle tap at the window of his room which looked into Mill Lane, and as he turned sharply round, he saw to his consternation and dismay a man's face gazing intently at him, and eagerly watching his every movement. Who could it be? As ill luck would have it, he had forgotten to draw down the blind, and therefore it was possible the stranger had seen everything. He repeated the word "Strange!" to himself, as by the dim light outside the face appeared to be one entirely unknown to him. Nervously placing himself in front of the secret cupboard, he proceeded to close the door, and as he did so the face at the window disappeared. He felt none the better for the fright, and, wiping the big drops of perspiration from his forehead, crept stealthily across to the window and pulled down the blind. At that moment there came a knock at his room door, and Jerry came in.

"There's some one as wants to see you, master," he said, "and he wished me to tell you it's very particular."

"Didn't he say who he was?" growled Brownlow with his usual roughness, though with sensations in the neighbourhood of his heart of anything but an agreeable character, "or what his business was?"

"No, he didn't. Nothing more than that he must see you, and wouldn't take no for an answer," replied Jerry.

"Oh! he said that, did he?" observed Brownlow. "He wouldn't take no, eh? We'll see about that.

Just you go and tell him, then, that I won't see him, that's flat!"

"Or you are," said a voice that Brownlow had often heard before, and devoutly wished he never might hear again, and which belonged to an individual who suddenly stepped into the room, and, first taking Jerry by the shoulders and pushing him outside the door, carefully closed it, and, folding his arms, stood in front of it. Despite very considerable alterations both in costume and personal appearance, the owner of the costume was not very difficult to recognise. He had unquestionably come down in the world, and his hat, coat, and boots looked none the better for the tumble. To use the very mildest term, they were miserably seedy, and would have failed to excite a bid even from the most speculative of Hebrew old clothesmen. But if the outward man was impaired by wear and tear, inwardly he was as great as ever, although he had suffered cruel reverses of fortune, and, from circumstances altogether beyond his control, had been compelled to surrender up the desk and ruler of his classical and commercial academy to another, he still possessed that implicit faith in his own capacities which had hitherto so pre-eminently distinguished him. In short, though Theophilus Rhomboid was not in so flourishing a condition of circumstances as when we first made his acquaintance, in other respects he was little if at all altered. On the occasion of this unexpected visit to Brownlow he was not in the very best of humours with that worthy, for during the time he had been in the pecuniary difficulties that had reduced him to this low

ebb, he had made more than one application to him for "a trifling sum of money," all of which had been treated with contempt. Therefore, as he closed the door, and, folding his arms, stood face to face with Brownlow, there was an expression on his countenance that boded no good.

"You won't see me, eh, George Brownlow?" he said mockingly, with a twitching about the corners of his mouth that the boys at the classical and commercial academy never liked to see, as they always knew it betokened mischief, and meant a liberal rulering all round. "Not see your old friend whom you have treated so well? I'm sure you couldn't mean it," he added in the same tone, seizing Brownlow's hand and squeezing it with a gripe that made him wince again; "I must have misunderstood what you said."

"Let go my hand," roared Brownlow, giving Rhomboid a push that sent him reeling against the door. "Curse your ugly face! I hoped I should never clap eyes on it again."

"That was too bad of you, a great deal too bad of you," answered Rhomboid, without the slightest appearance of excitement. "What a shocking thing is ingratitude," he continued, "especially in one for whom I sacrificed so much, my peace of mind, my—"

"Hold your gabbling," Brownlow broke in; "you don't want everybody to hear what you've got to say?"

"That rather depends," remarked Rhomboid, somewhat changing his tone. "Perhaps it may be necessary for other people to hear what it is. If I were to express

my candid opinion, I should say that you, more than I, have the greatest cause to desire me to keep silence."

"Both," replied Brownlow excitedly; "we're both in the same boat, and it's six of one and half a dozen of the other. You're not the sort to run yourself into danger; you're a precious deal too artful for that."

"Artful or not, Brownlow," said Rhomboid, crossing quickly to the other's side, and looking closely into his face, "if you don't give me the money I have come to-night to ask of you, it will be the worst night's work you ever did. I don't want to threaten you, but as true as I stand here I'll give information to the police of how you kidnapped that boy, and, what's more, I'll do it at once."

Brownlow's eyes quailed as they looked into those of the man who had thus spoken; he who had so long held another in his power now felt his position reversed, and as he watched the movements of Rhomboid's face he felt that he could expect no pity. There was time yet, however, to conciliate, to temporise; perhaps after all he might ensure his silence for a trifling sum, and under the circumstances he could not help spending some money.

"How much is it you want?" he inquired, after a pause.

"Now, come, that's right," responded Rhomboid, rubbing his hands. "I'm glad to see we've got to business at last. It is but little that I want, nor want that little long, still, as I am, so to speak, washed high and dry on the shores of bankruptcy, the sum must be something respectable."

"Confound you!" growled Brownlow, impatiently ; "spare all this palaver. How much do you want?"

"Well, as you are so pressing," was the reply, "suppose we say two hundred pounds ; that will give me a fresh start in the particular profession for which my classical and scholastic qualities so eminently qualify me. Yes, on reflection, two hundred will do very well."

"Two hundred fiddlesticks!" almost screamed Brownlow in his rage ; "are you mad, man? where do you suppose one in my position could get such a sum of money from?"

"I think I could suggest a place where it might be found," was the answer, "and that not so many miles away from this very room in which we now are ; say, for instance, from a secret cupboard, somewhere in the wall yonder, not very far from the fire-place."

It was a random shot, but it went home.

It was Rhomboid's face that Brownlow had seen peering in through the window !





CHAPTER XV.

WARNER'S HISTORY.

H, second papa! second papa!" said Mona, when she had led Warner, who never offered the slightest opposition, down to the bottom of the garden, to a little arbour wherein she was wont to pass many a long hour with no other companion than some old story book, and had made him sit down beside her, "what a naughty, good-for-nothing old boy you are not to tell Mona what the matter is! Why did I hear papa speaking so crossly, and what made you come out of his room asking yourself a silly question, and looking as if you were going to cry? As if everybody in the world wouldn't believe my second papa!" The child paused when she got thus far, for her quick eye caught the expression of pain that travelled over Warner's face, and she stopped short in her prattle as she saw him pass his hand wearily across his brow. Her bright, bonny look faded slowly away, the smiles and dimples changing to a half-frightened, half-confused stare, and then being

utterly lost in an earnest gaze of wonder and sympathy, that, as he met it, roused in him emotions such as alone are known to those who have suffered much and lived unpitied by their kind. As music oft awakens chords of melody within us long hushed and silent, so the glance of those gentle childish orbs, swollen with tender solicitude, twanged upon his heart's strings, and met with a response there.

"Mona, dear child," he murmured, "bless you for that look, for your gentle words, above all bless you for helping to keep some humanity alive within me. A few minutes back I was mad, desperate, and could have flung myself into the river in my desolation and disappointment."

"Whatever are you talking about?" inquired Mona, her big eyes wide open with astonishment. "I don't know what you mean."

"You will know soon enough," said Warner bitterly; "you will be taught to loathe, to despise me as an unclean thing."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" exclaimed Mona, putting her little hand up to her forehead and pressing it there, looking the picture of perplexity; "I wish I could make out what is the matter. He will talk so fast, and speak such long words, that my head is all in a muddle."

"Oh child, child," continued Warner, not noticing what she said, "may you never live to curse, as I do, the mother who gave me birth, and brought me into a world where the innocent can suffer for the guilty."

"Did ever anybody hear anyone go on like that?" again exclaimed Mona, edging, half frightened, away from her companion's side; "it's all mumble jumble rubbish that I don't understand one bit. I didn't know he ever had a mother; but I suppose he must have," she continued, "everybody has;" and then, as if suddenly awakening to the absurdity of her first observation, the pretty smile came back to her face, and she laughed softly.

As for Warner, he was leaning forward, his head resting on his hands, rocking himself to and fro with that monotonous motion that betokens restlessness of mind within. He was speaking aloud no longer, but muttering to himself in a wild incoherent fashion, that, as Mona gazed upon him, only puzzled her the more. For some few moments she watched him without uttering a word, and then, rising to her feet, passed to his side, and, touching him on the shoulder, said "poor second papa, do tell Mona what makes you so sad?" Slowly he raised his head and looked up at her, as again the words of sympathy and love echoed in his heart, and then, clasping her to his breast in a warm embrace, he kissed her passionately. Do not think, my children, that I want to preach to you, or to improve the occasion by trying to make you swallow a lot of "goodey" stuff that would make you hate me and my story into the bargain; but when you can minister sympathy and solace to an aching heart, and send a ray of sunlight into its desolate places, take readily to the task, for pity is one of the most blessed gifts that one human being can give to another.

As the refreshing showers to the parched earth, so it falls in a genial rain that invigorates and restores the drooping, fainting heart. As Warner felt Mona's arms clasped round his neck, and her soft face resting against his, some of the old courage came back to him, and hope awoke again. At last he had met with the sympathy for which his soul so long had craved, and turning with a look that it would be impossible to describe, so various were the expressions of which it was composed, to the little girl, who now sat wonderingly at his side, he took her hand in his, and, first of all pressing it to his lips, then held it between both his palms.

"You have asked me, Mona, to tell you what is the matter, what makes me seem so strange, and because I have loved you as my own child, and love you so dearly still, I can keep my trouble to myself no longer. Listen to me, then, while I tell you what you wish to know. Twelve years, long weary years ago, I was as happy and contented as the day was long, with a dear wife, and a darling little baby-boy, both of whom I prized as fondly as your papa does you. I was living then in that great city, London, about which I have so often told you, and was employed as clerk in a merchant's office there. Everybody was good and kind to me, and I prospered and thrived so well that I began to think that some day or other my baby-boy might live to be proud of his father's name. Ah ! Mona, Mona," he murmured, wandering away for a moment, "you would have loved the bright-eyed, merry little fellow, and would have made him your playmate and companion." Warner paused, and then, controlling his

emotion with an effort, continued—"but, as you will learn when you grow up, the dearest hopes are doomed to disappointment; and so with me, when all seemed summer time and bright flowers, and happiness, the thunder-storm came and swept all away. One night, being kept in town by pressure of business, I was sleeping at my employer's offices in the city, when, after all the house had retired to rest, I was disturbed by certain noises in the counting-house, that lay underneath my bedroom. I sat up in bed and listened, till I felt satisfied that something wrong was going on, for I knew that latterly the chief cashier had left a cash-box, containing a considerable sum of money, locked up in his desk in the counting-house. In less time, almost, than it takes me to tell you, I had dragged on my clothes, and was stumbling downstairs in the dark, in the direction whence I heard the noise proceed. My suspicions were confirmed, when, from under the door that led into the counting-house from the passage in which I was standing, I could discern unmistakable streaks of light. To hesitate was to allow the thief or thieves to accomplish their work, and without pausing for a moment I crept to the door and flung it suddenly open, but before I could get into the room it was enveloped in darkness, and when I did get in and was groping about in a vain endeavour to lay my hands upon something or somebody, the door through which I had entered was suddenly closed with a bang, and I heard a scuffling of feet in the passage, and then a noise as if the big door that led into the street was being opened. In a few seconds more,

and before I had time to open the counting-house and give chase, it was burst in by a man carrying a light, who rushed towards me, and seizing me by the collar of my coat, shouted ‘here is the thieving villain ; see his work —he has broken open the cashier’s desk.’” Again Warner paused; there were heavy drops of sweat standing on his forehead, and he seemed to breathe with an effort. Mona, who was still sitting at his side with the same wondering look on her face, neither moved nor spoke ; she was utterly lost in bewilderment and astonishment at the story that was being told her, the meaning of which had scarcely yet made itself intelligible to her young mind. Presently Warner continued—“Mona, I was taken into custody upon the charge that that wretch made against me, and three weeks afterwards was tried, and, on his evidence chiefly, convicted. He was the porter and watchman. He swore that he had heard a noise in the night, and on coming upstairs had found the door leading into the street slightly ajar, and, as he turned in the direction of the counting-house, a man, whose face he could not see, rushed out of it, and managed to rush past him and escape. He called loudly for help, and a constable came, and, upon making their way into the counting-house, I had been found there in the dark, close to the chief cashier’s desk, which had been forced, and from which the cash-box, that had been left safe the night before, had been taken. The constable was called, who corroborated him in these latter particulars, and added that he had seen a man run away from the front door of the premises, but hearing a loud outcry from within, he

restrained from pursuit, considering that his services were more required inside. I protested my innocence in vain. "It was beyond all doubt," so the judge said in sentencing me, "that I and some other person had conspired to rob my employers, and that I had admitted that other person to the premises; that together we had broken open the desk, and that, being interrupted in our guilty work, my accomplice had managed to get off with the cash-box, while I, less fortunate, had, luckily for the interests of justice, been caught red-handed. No reasonable person could entertain a moment's doubt as to my guilt, but as my employers had thought proper to recommend me to mercy, he would take a favourable view of my case, and only sentence me to imprisonment with hard labour for the space of eighteen calendar months." God help me! I never shall forget the awful shriek that rang in my ears when sentence was pronounced. It was my poor wife, who, buoyed up with hope to the last moment that I should be acquitted, sank fainting on the floor of the court. I saw her but once again after that. When my term of imprisonment came to an end, and I walked forth a free but marked and branded man into the world again, I went to the house where we had lived. I searched far and wide for her among her friends and relations, who all turned their backs upon me; she had disappeared with her baby no one knew whither, and I stood alone. I tried hard to get work, but everything seemed to go against me, till I got sick at heart, and wished I might die. At length I found my way here, to Barnslade, one day, and your papa took me on trial.

I struggled to gain his good opinion, and, though *I* say it, I worked hard and faithfully for him. But the shadow of the terrible past was ever at my elbow, while, by a strange freak of fate, I found that the man, upon whose evidence I had been convicted, was also in your papa's employ. He took good care that I should not forget him; he knew I was at his mercy, and availed himself of every opportunity to teach me that it was so. For years he has treated me little better than a dog, has sought to make me a partner with him in the many iniquities he has practised, but, thank heaven, I have been able to steer clear of them all, though I dared no expose him. But certain things came to my knowledge that forbade me keeping silence longer, and I warned him that I should communicate them to your papa. That threat was enough, and he vowed he would destroy me. This very morning he has seen Mr. Lloyd, and told him all against me that his venomous mind could think of, and now I, without being able to say a word in my own behalf, have been discharged by the employer whom I have served so long and so faithfully. Oh ! it is hard, very hard," groaned Warner, bitterly ; " hard to be looked upon with suspicion by those who do not know you, but how much harder when he who distrusts you has always found you faithful and honest." Warner had come to the end of his tale, and stopped here abruptly ; his eyes were full of tears, and his voice broken with emotion.

" Poor, poor second papa ! " said Mona, gently drawing one of her hands from his, and passing it coaxingly over his face ; " I am so sorry to see you cry. I am afraid I

have been a naughty inquisitive little girl, and that you won't ever forgive me for teasing you to tell me what was the matter."

"My dear child, do not think that," answered Warner. "It has done me good to open my heart to some one, for it felt to-day as if it would burst." Then, as he looked at the childish face so close to his, he could not help feeling what a long incomprehensible rigmarole his story must have appeared to her, and what a wild fancy it had been of his to wander through it from beginning to end for the edification of the little girl, to whom it must have seemed a very ugly fairy tale indeed. But he was back again now in the present, the ghosts of the past that he had conjured up had vanished, and he stood face to face with a future that frowned upon him mysterious and unfathomable as the depths in mid ocean. Uttering no word, making no sign, he rose mechanically to his feet, and in a moment more Mona was the sole occupant of the arbour. She did not attempt to follow ; she was far too discreet a young lady not to see that he wished to be alone, but with a slow and demure step, that would have befitted a woman of thirty, she walked towards the house.

I am not as young as I once was, and the thinner my hair gets about the crown of my head, the less able am I to appreciate the reflections that run through the young mind with respect to what they hear and see passing before them. It would be a difficult task to describe the thoughts of little Mona, the bewilderment of her ideas, the intense longing within her to do something, she could

not tell what, to make her dear friend William Warner happy. There was one person to whom she always went when she was troubled, and that was her papa; and as she thought of him her face brightened up, and she determined to go direct to him, and at once.

By strange twistings and turnings, by roundabout ways and curious paths, does the glorious truth sometimes find its way, only to shine the more brightly when the season comes for it to make itself manifest. Even by this little girl shall William Warner gain that vindication so long denied him.





CHAPTER XVI

NATURE'S HANDIWORK.

UNCLE Oliver still lingered with Janet at Herringbourne. The fresh sea breezes had done their work admirably, and his precious charge was getting quite robust and rosy under their healthful influences. Together they had made several pleasant fishing excursions, and Janet had already become a wonderful adept with her line, to the manifest discomfiture of the whitings and codlings who, disporting themselves in Herringbourne bay, fell victims to her wiles. When they were not amusing themselves on the water, they would take long walks along the cliffs, carrying their lunch in their pockets, and then when the hour of "*tiffin*" arrived, Uncle Oliver would discover some cosy, sheltered cranny, wherein they might take their slight repast in coolness and comfort. But the time for their holiday was now coming to an end, and both Sam and Aunt Sally were clamouring in their letters for the return of the absentees. "It's awful dull," wrote the latter, "without Jenny, and

Sam's getting a regular nuisance ; he does nothing but smoke all the evenings, and as for talking, he don't open his mouth except to grumble. So come back as soon as you like." It was with no slight sensation of regret that Uncle Oliver at last made up his mind that they must turn their heads in the direction of home, but knowing how fond his brother Sam was of the child, he felt it would be worse than selfish in him to keep them apart longer. Thus it had come about that on the particular morning when we return to their society, they were spending their last day at Herringbourne, and determined to make the most of it, Uncle Oliver had been up since five o'clock, pottering about on the beach among the fishermen, and saying good-bye to those he was not likely to see again before his departure. And I promise you he did not omit to bestow upon them certain substantial tokens of his regard, no small portion of which ultimately found its way into the till of the landlord of "The Three Smugglers." Deep and earnest were the regrets of the fishermen at the prospect of losing their generous friend, and the number of brawny hands that Uncle Oliver had to shake before breakfast would have exhausted an ordinary being. When he sat down to that meal, which was as usual presided over by Janet, and supplemented on this occasion by the presence of Mrs. Mortimer, who still remained a visitor at the pretty village by the sea, his appetite was, as he termed it, like that of a "roaring rampaging lion," and he evinced certain cannibalistic propensities towards Janet, warning her that if the sausages and toast did not come at once,

that it would be his melancholy but unavoidable duty to eat her without any cooking at all. Fortunately this was obviated by the timely appearance of the servant with a tray full of eatables, in the discussion of which all parties were very soon engaged. A more agreeable breakfast party, under more agreeable auspices, could hardly be conceived! The table was covered with a snowy cloth, and ornamented in the centre with a vase of exquisite flowers contributed by Mrs. Mortimer. Everything upon it was arranged with an order and good taste delightful to behold, while, in addition to its varied and numerous attractions of an edible character, it was placed at the open window fronting the sea, from over whose rippling bosom came a soft breeze, that carried with it health and appetite.

"Botheration!" exclaimed Uncle Oliver—I am sorry to add with his mouth full of buttered toast, and a consequent thickness of utterance—"I wish we weren't going to slip the cable from this pleasant port. Just to think of changing all this blue sky and fresh air for the smoke and smuts of dirty old London! We're downright lunatics; there ain't a doubt about that." Here he found it necessary to pause somewhat abruptly, as a portion of the toast had in a most unaccountable manner endeavoured to betake itself down the wrong way, to the intense indignation and irritation of Uncle Oliver's throat, who coughed, and puffed, and panted, till he was so red in the face that Mrs. Mortimer got quite alarmed, and proposed sending for a doctor.

"Don't be frightened, ma'am," he spluttered, gasping

for breath, "there's no occasion for that. I'm used to it, and shall be all right again in a few minutes."

And sure enough he was, returning to his assault upon the buttered toast with renewed vigour. The meal passed off without any further mishap, and it was settled that, so as to make the best of their last day in the sea air, it should be spent out of doors, in a trip to a very pretty spot some two miles and a half along the coast, which was known by the name of Beetle Brow. Mrs. Mortimer, much against her inclination, was compelled to decline accompanying them, as her health rendered her unequal to the fatigue, but in order to make some compensation to them and herself for this enforced absence, she requested their company to tea-dinner on their return. Between you and me, reader, not forgetting our esteemed friend the bed-post, Uncle Oliver turned rather sulky when he heard Mrs. Mortimer say she could not go, as the more he saw of that estimable lady, the more touched did he become by her eminently virtuous and domestic qualities. However, he put his disappointment into his pocket, and having carefully escorted the said lady to her own door, returned for Janet, who by that time was waiting for him ready dressed.

Indeed, it was a lovely day—so lovely, that I find it hard work to discover words fit to describe it. In fact, fine weather and glorious sunshine has been so often described, and in such varieties of eloquent and poetical language, that I am quite sure, as far as this humble individual is concerned, it would be simply impossible

for me to say anything new on the matter. By the way, this reminds me that according to an old and familiar saying, "there is nothing new under the sun," though as to the wisdom and truth of that observation I have always entertained a considerable doubt. Taken in its literal sense it is ridiculous; as to its allegorical interpretation, I prefer leaving it to wiser heads than mine to determine. But to return to the weather on the particular day which has been already mentioned, there certainly was nothing new in that, as it was nothing more than a repetition, not only of the past days, but of the past weeks—glorious, scorching sun, placid sea 'shimmering in its light, wind from the south-west that tantalised you at intervals with gentle puffs, making you, like Oliver Twist, "ask for more." Janet and her uncle wandered idly along the cliffs, he singing snatches of old sea songs, she ever and anon stopping and turning her face oceanwards, with that yearning in her heart just for one short glimpse of heaven and earth and water that every night and morning found its echo in her prayers. Days, weeks, years had passed now since first she had addressed her petition in baby-lispings, at Aunt Sally's knee, to the Merciful and True; but her darkness was as impenetrable as ever, and the chance of any change seemed hopeless. But sad as she was within herself, no one knew how heavy and grievous to her was the burden she had to bear; outwardly she smiled, but within her melancholy had taken up its abode, and in the solitude of her own room she would often murmur to herself, "Oh, that God had let me die when I was so ill, than

have spared me to feel what a useless, helpless creature I am." And now as she stood on the cliffs, Uncle Oliver holding her by the arm, her dead eyes wide open, but senseless in the dazzling sunlight, the sad, bitter thoughts rose up within her, till, for a moment, they seemed to choke her. Only a little patience, Janet, darling; only courage and strength to bear your burden a short time longer, and then to cast it off for ever.

"Come, Jenny, love," said Uncle Oliver, when she had stood thus mute and motionless for some minutes, "it is getting on for the hour of feeding, and Beetle Brow is a good mile on ahead yet, so we had best keep stirring our stumps."

Now I really am afraid my young people will consider that Uncle Oliver was nothing better than a horrible old glutton, who thought of little else but eating and drinking, and who devoted the major part of his existence to gormandising; but, upon my word, it was not so. His only fault in that respect, if fault it can be called, was, as he himself observed, "that he liked his meals 'reg'lar';" in point of fact, he made them the sign-posts by which to determine his movements and proceedings for the day, and want of punctuality in such matters was regarded by him as a very heinous offence. Janet knew all this by experience, and so, without venturing any remonstrance, she hurried along at his side until they reached Beetle Brow. Why the spot had received that particular appellation I cannot say, save and except from the forbidding aspect of the cliffs that overhung the beach at this point. At their summit, however, by

way of affording a striking contrast, nature, in some strange mood, had planted a score or more of luxuriantly-foliaged trees in the centre of a patch of verdant herbage, through the midst of which meandered a tiny stream of pure, fresh water, that made sweet music as it flowed. Truly this was a pleasant place in which to lounge and linger on a summer afternoon, away from the heat and the glare, with none to interrupt or annoy.

* * * * *

When lunch had been produced from the little bag that Uncle Oliver carried, and duly discussed by him with much zest, but by her with trifling appetite, they settled themselves down to the exhaustive business of idling away the afternoon. By-and-bye Janet's eyes grew heavy, and, with her head resting on a little mound of turf, that seemed made for a pillow, she was soon in the land of dreams. Uncle Oliver watched over her for a long time, and then, getting somewhat tired of doing nothing, he thought there could be no harm in stretching his legs with a short walk, as she was in such a nice deep sleep that it was unlikely she would awake before he returned. So he got up on his feet and strolled slowly away !

* * * * *

When Janet awoke she called for her uncle, but there was no response ; she repeated his name, but still no answer. What could be the matter ? where could he have gone to ?—she asked herself. She felt about her in the direction where she had supposed him to be sitting, but he was not there ; it was plain that he had

gone, but where to?—how long for? I know that young ladies who figure in story-books ought not to be frightened, but Janet unquestionably was, and as she stood up her face was very pale, and her heart thumped against her side in a very unpleasant manner. Some unaccountable impulse, she could not understand what it was, urged her to try and find her way from among the trees out on to the cliffs, nor had she much difficulty in doing this, for she had been so often to "Beetle Brow" that instinct showed her the path. It would have been far wiser and safer for her to stay where she was, but she was frightened, and fear makes us do many foolish things!

Uncle Oliver was exceedingly angry with himself; thinking about one thing and another, he had walked a great deal too far along the cliffs, and had been away from Janet much longer than he intended. It is not unlikely that he would have strolled on a still greater distance, but the sky had become suddenly overcast, and certain rumblings and grumblings made themselves audible and betokened the approach of a thunder-storm. Calling himself all sorts of bad names, Uncle Oliver hastened back in the direction of Beetle Brow. Already heavy drops of rain were falling, and the lightning darted hither and thither with unusual brilliancy, while the peals of thunder seemed to shake the very ground over which he was passing. When he rushed in amongst the trees on Beetle Brow to the spot where he and Janet had been sitting, what was his horror to find her gone. Gone whither in such a storm, alone, and she blind and help-

less? He shouted her name, but his voice was lost in the battle of the elements. Frantically he rushed out again on to the cliffs towards Herringbourne, straining his eyes over the desolate space that lay before him. Yes, there she was, hurrying on, as best her infirmity would allow, homeward, but so near the edge of the cliffs that a trifling swerve to the left would consign her to destruction. Uncle Oliver, though she was a long way from him, saw it all in a glance, and knew her danger. With the energy of despair he ran after her, calling her name aloud, but the rain beat in his face and she heard him not. He dug his nails into the palms of his hands in the agony of his mind, as he saw her slightly inclining in the fatal direction; it seemed to him as if she were on the very edge of the precipice, and that another breath and she would disappear. "Oh, God!" he screamed, "save her, in pity's name save her!" Then there came a flash of forked lightning, so acutely brilliant that it dazzled and dazed him for a moment, and he could not see anything; but when its effect had passed, he was himself almost at the brink of the cliff. Another instant and he held Janet in his arms, and with a muttered thanksgiving he took her up and carried her to a shed which stood close by, that was sometimes used by the coastguardmen, wherein they could have some slight shelter from the rain, and wait till the storm had passed. They did not have their tea-dinner with Mrs. Mortimer that evening—she came round to their lodgings instead, and sat by Janet's bedside; for the doctor, in order to provide against her catching cold, had to advise her

being put to bed early. He was a strange, fussy little man, but accounted very clever in Herringbourne, and more than one of the fishermen's wives declared that they owed their life to his skill and attention. When he had felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, and last, but not least, made a very close examination of her eyes, Doctor Bolus called Uncle Oliver aside and asked him several questions about Janet's ordinary health, as to how long she had been blind, and so forth; then, with an apology, and saying that he would return in a few minutes, he caught up his hat, bounded out of the room, and in a moment more was hurrying along the street towards his own house. He did return in the few minutes very hot, very excited, and very peremptory in his orders to Mrs. Mortimer to shut all light out of the room, to fetch him a lighted candle, and then to take both herself and Uncle Oliver down stairs till he rang for them. All this was done as he desired, and he was left alone with his patient.

About ten minutes after he came trotting down to the room in which Uncle Oliver and Mrs. Mortimer were sitting, his face literally beaming with pleasure. "It's all right," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands, "perfectly right. I felt certain that I had not made a mistake." "What's all right," inquired Uncle Oliver and Mrs. Mortimer in chorus, looking inquiringly at one another, as the latter added, "I never thought there was the prospect of anything wrong excepting a cold!"

"Cold, pooh!" said the little doctor; "allow me also to add pish and pshaw! It's her eyes that are right,

right as yours—I mean as mine are ! If we only keep her dark and quiet for a week she'll be able to see like a cat in a coal cellar. There, there's news for you." And with that away went Dr. Bolus upstairs again in an ecstacy of excitement and delight.

And so Janet's prayer was heard at last !





CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE TRACK.

 HERE was no little excitement among the factory hands when it was found that William Warner had mysteriously disappeared from Barnslade, leaving all his belongings behind him at his lodgings, without word or line in writing as to why or whether he had taken his departure. The motive that could have prompted him was altogether inexplicable, save to Oliver and Mr. Lloyd ; and what had passed at the memorable interview was unknown. Consequently all sorts of speculations were rife as to the cause of this sudden flight, indeed not a few of the more knowing ones expressed it as their deliberate opinion that it was no flight at all, but that Warner, whose melancholy manner was well known to all, had in a crazy mood got rid of himself in the muddy waters of the river Card. But whether in the Card or out of it, he was gone from Barnslade, and none knew his whereabouts. When I say none, there perhaps I am wrong, for it did so happen,

upon the very afternoon of the day when he was last seen in the town, he chanced to meet Oliver, to whom, in a strangely wild and incomprehensible fashion, bidding good-bye, he murmured something about going to London ; but that same city is a big place, and the information thus possessed was but scant indeed.

Mr. Lloyd was not altogether satisfied with himself. He had passed a sleepless night, and the more he thought over the matter the more convinced did he become that he had been unduly severe with Warner, and the least he could have done would have been to hear the explanation he endeavoured to give. I am bound to say that Mona had not a little to do with his coming to this conclusion, as, after her *tête-à-tête* with her second papa in the arbour, she had gone direct to papa No. 1, and declared it as her opinion that he had been very badly used. Fond as Mr. Lloyd was of his little daughter the subject was one upon which he felt disinclined to trifle, and with a sharpness that quite startled the young lady, he desired her to hold her peace, and not further discuss the matter. If again he had had a little more patience, and allowed her to prattle on, it would have been well for him to hear what she could have told him. The day following his short interview with Warner he was walking in the garden before breakfast, when Mona came running up to him, her eyes full of tears. "Oh, papa, papa," she sobbed, "William Warner has run away, and no one knows where he has gone to."

"Run away, child ! what do you mean ?" inquired Mr. Lloyd ; "who has put such nonsense into your

head? It's not very likely that he would take himself off without first being paid his salary."

"It is true, papa, quite true," stilled sobbed the child; "and it's all because you were so cross and unkind to him."

"Mona, how dare you speak to me like that?" exclaimed Mr. Lloyd, angrily; go in-doors directly, and on no account say such a thing to me again." Mona made no reply, but did as she was told, making her way to the breakfast-room, where she was presently joined by her papa, whose manner towards her seemed much altered by the few moments' reflection he had had, for, coming up to her side, he took her in his arms and kissed her fondly.

When the meal was over, and Mr. Lloyd was prepared to start for the factory, that pampered quadruped Nancy was led round to the door for Mona to accompany him on her back, but she resolutely refused to make herself useful until she had been regaled with several lumps of sugar. At last, however, when Miss Nancy's sweet tooth had been satisfied, a start was accomplished; and despite a strong effort on the pony's part to take herself back to her stable, regardless of bit or bridle, the short journey was accomplished in safety. As was her wont, Mona left her papa at the door of the counting-house, and rode into the factory yard, where the hands were assembling after breakfast, preparatory to resuming work. It was strange to see how, as she made her appearance among them, they all pressed round her bidding her "good morning," and blessing her pretty face.

"Oh dear, oh dear," exclaimed Mona, seeing a tall and rather handsome woman with her arm in a sling, "whatever is the matter, Mrs. Mulaney? I hope your finger isn't bad again?"

"Thank you kindly, Miss," replied the woman, "but I'm sorry to say as it's worse this time than it's ever been before."

"I've been a-telling her," put in another who was standing by her, "that if she don't pretty soon go up and see you, Miss, and get some more of that ointment, she'll lose the top joint."

"You shouldn't have told her that," remonstrated Mona, with the dignity of a duchess; "it's very unkind of you, Mrs. Brewer, to frighten her, but you're quite right as to the ointment, and the best thing she can do is to go up to the house at once, and I'll be there as soon as she is."

This is but a sample of the many conversations which passed between Mona and the hands in the factory yard. She had a kind word and smile for all, and even the roughest and most disreputable among the men would pull off their caps as she came up to them. Only once had she ever been treated with rudeness, and that was by a coarse brute of a fellow who scarcely knew what it was to be sober, and who, with a volley of the foulest oaths, told her that he did not want her to come "palar-varing" him. But his punishment followed swift and sudden, as one of his companions, without waiting to remonstrate or warn him, coolly knocked him flat down on the ground, amidst the warmly-expressed plaudits of

all who were present. Nancy, although occasionally a most disobedient and troublesome young person, on these occasions conducted herself with the most becoming dignity and propriety, no doubt entertaining in her own mind a sincere conviction that she was as much an object of admiration and respect as her young mistress, consequently she picked her way about among the crowd of men and women with a care that did her the highest credit.

Her morning inspection was over, and Mona was riding slowly towards home, when, as luck would have it, whom should she meet but Oliver, running very fast, and evidently late for the factory. She was, however, determined to speak to him, and pulling up called to him to come to her. Our hero was very hot and red in the face with his exertions, besides he was already sufficiently over time, and would likely enough catch it from Brownlow, so he pretended not to hear, but kept on his way. As I have before said, Miss Mona was a very positive young lady, and was not to be defeated in this fashion, so giving Nancy a flip with her whip, she rode after him, and brought him to a standstill.

"I want to know," she said, "if you have heard anything more about William Warner?"

"No, miss, I haven't," replied Oliver, trying to dodge round Nancy's hind quarters and keep on his way; a piece of strategy, however, which was nipped in the bud.

"But you saw him yesterday afternoon, did you not?"

persevered Mona ; "at least so they say up at the factory."

"Yes, miss, I did," answered our hero, impatiently.

"And what did he say?"

"He only said good-bye, and that he was going."

"Well, where did he say he was going?"

"I don't know exactly, but he muttered something about London."

"Anything more?"

"Only that he was going a long way off, and that I should never see him again. And now," continued Oliver, hurriedly changing the subject, "please let me go on to the factory, or I shall get into trouble."

"No, no ; you must not go on to the factory ; you must come up to the house ; and I will give you some money to go to London after William Warner, and fetch him back again."

Poor little Mona ! she knew not what a great wilderness of streets and houses, or how many millions of living beings were to be found in the same city of which she spoke. To her mind, whithersoever her dear old friend was gone, there it would be perfectly easy to find him. As for Oliver, the suggestion that he should go to London excited various emotions, chief among which was the prospect of seeing Sam, Aunt Sally, and Janet. If he could only get back to them once again, he would snap his fingers at Brownlow, and dare him to do his worst. As these thoughts occurred to him, he turned mechanically upon his heel, and followed Mona, who was already moving on towards the house. Factory

time, Brownlow's anger, all were forgotten, as he remembered how kind and good Warner had been to him; and then he thought it would be but a little thing for him to do to find him out, as Mona had suggested. It was a curious coincidence that these two children, both knowing the secret of William Warner's life, hardly appreciated its value, else, loving him as much as they both did, they would have proclaimed it trumpet-tongued from one end of Barnslade to the other. Shall I tell you what Mona did when she got home? On the mantelpiece in her own little room was a money-box, into which from time to time more than one kind friend had dropped coins of greater or less value; that it was well lined was proved by the rattle it made as she lifted it up and opened it. Without prying too inquisitively into its contents, I may say that there were several gold pieces, bearing a very strong resemblance to what vulgar people call sovereigns. Taking out no less than five of these same pieces, Mona closed the box, and walked to the front door, where Oliver was standing.

"Here is some money," she said, holding out her hand with the glittering coins in it towards him. "I think it will be enough to take you to London by the train. I don't know how much it costs, but I have heard papa say that it is very dear."

Oliver gazed at her outstretched palm with a mixed feeling of astonishment and awe; as to the specific value of the coins that rested on it he was entirely ignorant, except so far that he knew them to be worth something considerable; he tried to remember the money tables

that he had learnt at Rhomboid's, but beyond arriving at a conclusion that four farthings make a penny, his mind was in hopeless confusion. Nervously holding out his fingers, he took the money from her hand, and hurriedly thrust it into his pocket.

"Be sure you make him come back again, for I am quite certain that papa is very sorry he has gone away, and will be glad to see him again." In this expression of opinion Mona was perhaps assuming a little too much, and rather expressed, on her father's behalf, what she herself felt. Be this as it may, Oliver made up his mind to perform the task proposed for him, and without waiting for further instructions turned on his heel, and was soon making his way towards the railway station. As he walked along he began to reflect more seriously than perhaps in the whole of his life he had ever done before. Young though he was he had already passed through some strange vicissitudes, which at the time he had not known how to appreciate. But now an indescribable steadiness seemed to come over him, as when we grow older we find the thoughts and feelings change, and calculation and discretion take the place of hurry and thoughtlessness. There was no misunderstanding in his mind as to the character of the enterprise upon which he was entering, but his boyish pluck and love for adventure made him laugh at the difficulties which a man of maturer years would have imagined almost insurmountable.

He had not to wait long at the station ; the mid-day train for London was due, and had already been sig-

nalled. So, putting a bold face upon it, Oliver walked up to the booking-office and asked for a ticket to London. The clerk eyed him somewhat suspiciously, and then asked him which class he wanted, but the boy had not the slightest notion what he meant ; he made no answer, and other people beginning to clamour for their tickets, he found himself pushed away. At the same moment the train came whizzing up to the platform, and the usual bustle ensued of passengers getting in and out. "Take your seats, please !" shouted the porters, banging the doors, making confusion worse confounded ; and Oliver, forgetting all about such a thing as paying his fare, tumbled into the nearest carriage, and only just in time, for at the same instant the train began to move on its journey.

As soon as he had time to look about him, Oliver found that his sole companion was an elderly gentleman with a good deal of nose and a great deal of hair, which literally shone again with the grease that had been bestowed upon it. He was most affable and condescending to our hero, whom he called "a fine little fellow," patting him on the head, and pawing him about in the most friendly manner.

"And so the little man," said the stranger, inquiringly, "is going to London, is he ? and what is the little man going to do when he gets to London ? Is he going home to his papa and mamma, or to stay with some kind friend ?"

Despite his affability Oliver did not altogether like the manner of his new friend. There was an artful look

about his eyes, and an oily smoothness in his manner, anything but prepossessing. If you and I, reader, had seen him, we should have thought it rather odd that so fine a gentleman, with such noble-looking clothes, and such gorgeous rings, should be riding, as he was, in a third class carriage ; but Oliver, who understood none of the distinctions of railway class, only saw that he was very ugly, and not at all like the kind of people he had to do with, so he didn't answer the questions put to him, but, nestling into one corner, went fast asleep. When he awoke the train was standing still, and he heard voices calling out " Tickets ! tickets !" The sound was rather disagreeable to him as he suddenly recollect ed that he had forgotten to buy a ticket ; but " what does it matter," he said to himself, " I have got money in my pocket, and can pay now." He put his hand into the place where he had deposited the sovereigns Mona had given him, when to his horror he found them gone ! Could he have made any mistake as to the pocket ? —he felt in all the others, but not a sign of them remained. Then he looked towards his travelling companion, but he was fast asleep, snoring with a vehemence terrible to hear. By this time the collector had arrived at the carriage door, and demanded Oliver's ticket.

" I haven't got one," was the reply ; " but I could have paid now, only I've lost my money."

" Lost your money ;" jeered the surly official ; " that's a very old story—come out of that. Them as don't pay has to be locked up." The gentleman with the nose suddenly woke up, and, as if with an intuitive knowledge

of what had occurred, at once offered to pay Oliver's fare for him, which, with much flourish and self-patting on the back, he proceeded to do.

"There, my dear," he said to our hero, "see what I've been and done for you, saved you from a prison, and perhaps the gallows too. It ain't every stranger as would have done that, but I'm out of the common, and have got too much heart."

Oliver, who was greatly distressed at his position, and having lost his money, paid but little attention to the stranger, but, as he reflected, he thought he was rather ungrateful after what had been done for him, and so thanked him as best as he could.

"Lost your money, my dear!" said the stranger, after Oliver had told him how he had had the sovereigns safe in his pocket at the Barnslade station, and how they had mysteriously disappeared; "that's a bad job. London ain't the place to be in without money; but look here, if you like to come and sleep at my house, I'll make you nice and comfortable."

Altogether at his wits' end to know what to do, Oliver accepted the invitation. Four-and-twenty hours hence, young though he was, he would have thought twice before availing himself of the hospitality of Mr. Benjamin Aaron.





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BITER BIT.

BROWNLOW was in a passion — everything, somehow or other, seemed to be going wrong with him. This week's work was all behind, and though he abused Jerry and the Cripple, and kept them on the shortest of commons, it looked very much as if he would draw about half his usual sum on Saturday night. He had waited all day for Oliver's appearance in his usual place at the loom, but the time passed, and there was no sign of him. What could have become of him? — was he skulking, or had he made a bolt of it altogether? This last notion Brownlow denounced as altogether untenable; he had far too exalted an opinion of the power he possessed over the lad to believe it possible that he should attempt anything of the sort; so he ground his teeth and chuckled over the thrashing he would give him when he came back in the evening. Nor was Brownlow altogether at his ease about Rhomboid. That worthy had remained hanging about Barn-

slade since the evening, when his face had been seen looking through the window in Mill Lane. Although he had been unable to get the two hundred pounds out of Brownlow that he had demanded of him, he by no means allowed him to remain at peace, but pertinaciously called on him every evening "for a loan of ten shillings," or something "towards paying for his night's lodging." And Brownlow dared not refuse him, for no one better than he appreciated the desperation of poverty, or understood the length to which it would drive a man. Moreover he knew Rhomboid well enough to feel that he, least of all persons, was to be trifled with, and that he would not stand being treated to that well known dish, "the cold shoulder." As he sat all this day at the loom, working, his mind was much occupied in thinking how he could get rid of this tormentor to his peace and quiet, who was playing much the same part towards him that he had towards William Warner. I do not want to paint Brownlow too black, or to make him too much of a villain, but truth compels me to state, that he had a very strong inclination to shoot, strangle, or otherwise finally dispose of the aforesaid Rhomboid, who with the most praiseworthy discretion took good care not to afford him the opportunity. If he had, I am not sure that Brownlow possessed the courage to avail himself of it, for though murder is a fearful and cowardly thing in itself, the perpetrator must have some pluck to run the risk of the gallows, and this was a quality in his disposition and character conspicuous by its absence.

The dinner-bell rang for the hands to break off for an

hour, but Brownlow never left his loom ; he sat doggedly at it, working with a stubborn obstinacy that made more than one of the people remark to one another as they passed, "he's got one of his sulky fits on." As for Jerry and the cripple, he kept them hard at it as well, only addressing them now and then to curse their slowness, or abuse them for clumsiness in handling the shuttle. There the three of them sat in the long ward, now emptied of the fifty and more occupants, who a few minutes since were busy as bees, presenting a strange and incongruous picture. Brownlow, his face dark with evil thoughts and ill-humour ; Jerry, cheerful and bright as ever, making all sorts of comical faces and signs at the Cripple, whose pale wan cheek, and lustrously bright eyes looked more painfully prophetic than ever. Now and then he would pause in his work for a moment, glancing nervously at Brownlow, to see whether he was watching, and would pant from sheer exhaustion, his chest heaving up and down as he gasped for breath. Oh ! how his soul longed for the green fields and fresh air, where on the shaded banks of some rippling stream he might lie down and rest, drinking into his lungs that new life which nature's self bestows. Here all was heat and noise and flurry ; existence was like the "whir, whir" of the looms, in its ceaseless, monotonous drudgery, that with all its turning, and twisting, and spinning, turned out too early a winding-sheet for many a one. But out there in the glorious meads beyond the town where the Card wound its way among the giant willows, might peace and quiet be found, and body and soul gain free

inspiration and stimulus. "Oh! for Sunday to come again," murmured the cripple longingly to himself; but it was only the middle of the week, and God's blessed Sabbath was still far off, and could be brought no nearer—and never will for you, little Mike, this side the grave. All your sighs, and longings, and sufferings, shall be quieted for ever ere another Sabbath sun gilds the spire of the old parish church, and wakes the good townsfolk to their holiday. Even now, as you sit bending wearily over your task, a messenger is standing at your elbow, only awaiting the hour the Master has appointed to call you to His home!

All through that long summer afternoon Brownlow and the two boys laboured assiduously without bite or sup, like galley-slaves. Once or twice he growled out something about Oliver's absence, and muttered ominously "that he would teach him not to be up to these larks again;" but beyond this he worked on silent and morose. As for Jerry, he began to get exceedingly disgusted at the state of affairs, and though he said nothing, his face spoke volumes in the fullest sense of the term, and he grimaced and contorted his features at Brownlow, when he was not looking, in a way that sent some of the other hands who were near into convulsions of laughter. As he was engaged in one of these performances the door of the ward opened, and Mr. Lloyd entered; his visits were few and far between, but he held it to be a matter of duty to occasionally appear among his hands, and see how things were going on. Slowly he passed up the ward, pausing here and there to say a word, until at

length he reached Brownlow's loom. As he stopped, his eyes lighted on the Cripple, and as they took in the worn and weary look on the child's face, a thrill almost of horror shot through him.

"Take that boy home this instant," he said hurriedly to Brownlow, "and on no account let him do any more work this week. He is worn out and ill, can't you see?"

"Oh, he's right enough, sir," replied Brownlow, still pursuing his work.

"No, he ain't," rapped out Jerry, all of a heap, regardless of consequences, "he's been a puffing and wheezing all day, and he told me in the morning how his head was aching fit to split."

"Brownlow," said Mr. Lloyd, more slowly, but as decisively as before, "I have given you orders to take that boy home, and I beg that you will do as you have been told."

Brownlow rose from his seat with very ill grace, casting an evil eye at Jerry, who never flinched.

"You keep on working till the bell rings," he growled, "and see to everything being set neat and straight."

"No; he will knock off too," said Mr. Lloyd. "Aren't you tired, my lad?" he inquired of Jerry.

"Yes, I am, Sir," was the reply, "and very hungry too. I ain't had nothing to eat since breakfast, and that weren't much of a meal. The guvnor's been a getting—"

What he would have added did not appear, as Brownlow thinking further disclosures undesirable, interrupted

him by saying something to Mr. Lloyd on quite another subject. The factory-owner, however, was not to be put off in this way, as he said in a whisper to Brownlow, "Don't let me hear of your ill-using any of these lads, or else you and I shall quarrel. You understand what I mean," he added, passing on down the ward with a look that was not to be mistaken. Sullenly, and muttering under his breath, Brownlow slowly walked out at the door by which Mr. Lloyd had entered, followed by the two boys, neither of whom were in the best of spirits, foreseeing the storm which would inevitably burst upon them when they got home.

But there was a welcome awaiting Brownlow that he little expected. When he reached the door of his house in Mill Lane, he was somewhat surprised to find it wide open. This was altogether inexplicable, as he had left it securely locked, and carried off the key in his pocket. As he examined it more closely, he saw that it had been violently forced open with some instrument; and then seized by a sudden panic, he rushed hurriedly through the boys' room into his own *sanctum*, only there to find his worst fears realized.

His secret cupboard had been broken open, and his cashbox stolen!

It would be difficult to describe the whirlwind of passion that ensued; he stamped and raved up and down the room, cursing his cruel fate, and vowing vengeance against everybody and everything. Then, when the storm was passed and he had grown calmer, he began to reflect as to who could be the thief. Who knew of his

hiding-place? Rhomboid evidently had some suspicion on the subject, and had mysteriously pointed in its direction. Could it be he? He looked out of the window, and self answered self—impossible, for there was Rhomboid walking slowly up Mill Lane, in the direction of his house. He would have fled had he been the thief: he would not have dared to face him, and so soon too! Flight was a sign of guilt; and where was Oliver? In shorter time than it takes to write, Brownlow had made up his mind that it was Oliver who had stolen his money!





CHAPTER XIX.

AMONG LAND SHARKS.

THIS seemed to Oliver to take the cab, in which they were being conveyed from the railway station, a very long time to reach the place where his new acquaintance had promised to provide him with a night's lodging. They had been bumping and rattling over the stones for more than half an hour, and yet had failed to arrive at their destination. The broad well lighted streets through which they had passed in the earlier part of their drive were now exchanged for narrow and dark thoroughfares, whose gloominess was occasionally relieved by the crystal splendours of some gin-palace at a corner, where flaming gas-burners glittered amid pyramids of spirit bottles, and flashed temptation out upon the pavement. At each and all of them a busy trade was going on: men and women jostling one another, trying to forget to-day, only to remember it with aching head and feverish tongue the more keenly on the morrow! And not only men and women, but young lads

and fragile girls, aping the vices and profanities of their elders, and selling body and soul, honesty and honour, for means to enable them to indulge in like profligacy and wickedness—a wild *vogue la galère* existence, a terrible sight to see in the heart of a civilised country, in the midst of a rich and Christian city. But it has been seen in its many phases, and deeply studied too, by him who writes these pages; in the gallery of the down-east theatre; in the heat and stench of the penny “gaff,” with its atmosphere reeking with poisonous spirits, and still more poisonous tobacco; in the dormitories of the Wapping lodging-house, such as Mrs. Connolly kept, and had burned about her ears; in the Whitechapel dancing saloon, with its discordant music and reckless chatter; in the lock-up at the police station; and last, but far from least, because the inevitable ending to life such as this, in the dock of the Criminal Court. Oh, my children, it is right and politic for you to know that such things can be, so that you may remember, when you have grown older, where much good missionary work may be done. The picture I have drawn is no fancy one; it is painted with the cold, stern hand of truth!

Oliver was beginning to get a little nervous, and moved uneasily in his seat, a proceeding, on his part, that provoked a surly enjoinder from his companion to sit still. The further they got in their drive the more disagreeable did Mr. Benjamin Aaron become, and every now and then he amused himself by kicking our hero's shins, and then rubbing his hands together with the accompani-

ment of a chuckle that sounded unpleasantly cold-blooded ; in fact, any one to whom the history of the immortal Blunderbore was known, would have been forcibly reminded of the demeanour of that celebrated person preparatory to his taking his luncheon, and would have imagined that Mr. Aaron was an admirer and imitator of the customs of the Fee Chee Islanders.

"So, my little man," he said, still rubbing his hands, as if exceedingly pleased with his own thoughts, "you're getting a little tired, are you? That's bad, naughty, wicked. Small boys should never get tired, especially when they've met with such a nice kind friend, who is going to put them up, and make them so comfortable; it's ungrateful—very ungrateful."

"I'm not tired, sir," replied Oliver ; "only I should very much like to know where you are taking me to."

"Taking you to?—ah, ah! That's very good, very funny," replied his companion. "Would you like to know, my dear? Of course you would; but you shan't." With that he gave Oliver's knee a painful squeeze between his own, which by no means quieted the tremulous flutterings in the neighbourhood of that young gentleman's heart. Almost at the same moment, the cab came to a standstill, in a narrow street, where there was only room for one vehicle to pass at a time, in front of a dismal-looking house, over the entrance door of which burned a dim gas-light. The place was not an attractive one, and as Oliver was dragged out upon the pavement by Mr. Aaron, he showed unmistakable signs of resistance, which, however, availed him little, as the

cabman never offered to interfere, and the grip upon his arm took no denial. A moment more and the door had been opened, and he found himself pushed into a dark passage, at the further end of which he saw a light, and heard the sound of voices singing in chorus. "Come along, my dear," said Mr. Aaron, still holding Oliver by the arm, and leading him in the direction of the light: "I'm going to introduce you to some nice gentlemen, who you're sure to like very much. They're such jolly boys,"

Oliver was far from comfortable, and the prospect of the jolly boys did not reassure him; on the contrary, he struggled with his companion, but it was of no use, and, despite his resistance, he found himself drawn along to the end of the passage, through the door. The sight that presented itself was a strange one. A long room, lighted by two chandeliers, consisting of a pair of wooden hoops, with bits of candle stuck all round them, bordered on either side by narrow tables, at which some score of men were sitting drinking and smoking. The conclusion of the chorus that Oliver had heard was being greeted with rattling of tin cups out of which they were imbibing, and stamping of feet.

"Hold your row, will you," said Mr. Aaron, on entering; "do you want the bobbies to be down upon us? I'm bothered if I don't put the lights out, and stop the liquor."

No one made any reply, except a tall ugly-looking man in one corner, with a horrible squint and a large scar on his left cheek, who merely observed, "All right, father."

They were a queer and motley crew, those lodgers of Mr. Benjamin Aaron—the sort of persons one would not like to meet in a lonely lane on a dark night. There seemed to be almost every possible variety of physiognomy among them ; nor was it difficult to see that other countries than England had the distinguished honour of calling them subjects. The man with the squint, for instance, had all the appearance of a Spaniard, and was one, while his companion was talking to him with all the excitement and gesticulation of a Frenchman. As for their costumes, they were of all sorts and kinds ; some had rough pilot jackets, while others appeared in flaming red shirts, without any coat over them. As for their legs, they were cased in the most extraordinary assortment of trousers and boots ever seen. Judging, however, from their general appearance and conversation, it was not a very hazardous conclusion to arrive at, that they were many of them seafaring men, and had seen a good deal of rough work in their time.

Mr. Benjamin Aaron led our hero into a small side room, and pushed him on to a chair.

“ Sit you down there, my dear,” he growled ; “ and don’t let me catch you moving, or it won’t be over and above comfortable for you.”

“ But, sir,” said Oliver, “ I’m very tired, and want to go to bed, please.”

“ Do you ? ” snapped Mr. Aaron ; “ then you’ll have to wait ; ” and with that he went back into the larger room.

Oliver’s position was anything but an agreeable one ;

what with Mr. Aaron's demeanour towards him, and the look of the place in which he now was, he felt that he was in a dangerous predicament, the end of which he could not foresee. Could they be going to do him any harm? He had heard of young boys being decoyed into bad places in London, and murdered; was it possible that anything of the sort was impending over him now? Bang, bang, bang, went his heart against his side, and a sickly sensation of fear possessed his whole system. A great lump seemed to rise in his throat, that almost choked him. It was a bitter trial for so young a lad, without a friend or helping hand to assist him. He looked out through the door into the big room, and there saw Mr. Aaron engaged in a deep and earnest conversation with the man with the squint, whose appearance seemed more horribly forbidding than before. He was listening attentively to what the master of the establishment was saying and every now and then nodded his head approvingly. At last their conference came to an end, and Mr. Aaron returned into the room, where our hero was sitting.

"Get up, my dear," he said, catching Oliver by the jacket; "you may go to bed now if you like. That gentleman," he added, pointing to the man with the squint, who was standing in the doorway, "will show you your room, and he has promised to take care of you, and keep all bogies away."

The man with the squint leered at Oliver, with a repulsive grin all over his face. "Come along, young master," he said, "you're sleepy, and so am I. It's

such a nice little room, up at the top of the house, so quiet and comfortable."

It was not surprising, that as Mr. Aaron dragged Oliver, who, I am bound to say, resisted like a Trojan, he called out loudly for assistance. But all in vain! The policeman on duty outside in the street could hear nothing, thanks to Mr. Benjamin Aaron's precautions; and as for that gentleman's lodgers, they knew better than to interfere. Once in the grasp of the brawny Spaniard, and our hero felt himself caught up bodily, and carried out of the room. He hit out boldly with his hands, and kicked and struggled with all the strength at his command, but to no purpose. His captor bounded up the creaking stairs with him in his arms, and finally took him into a small bedroom, where he flung him on the bed with a grunt of satisfaction.

"There, you be there, young master," he said, "and don't you be up to any games, but try and go to sleep, I don't want to be rough with you, but it all depends on how you behave. I'm not in the habit of sticking at anything, so you'd better not give me any trouble."

All that Oliver asked himself was, "What would come next?"

The Spaniard went across the room to a cupboard, from which he took a bottle and a glass, and then placed them upon a small table that stood by the window. Next he sat down by the table, and poured out some of the contents of the bottle into the glass, which, in a moment more, he had tossed down his throat. He smacked his lips, and seemed to like it so well that he repeated

the operation, not once, nor twice, but thrice. Presently the liquid, whatever it was, appeared to take effect upon him, for he rested his head on his hand, and dozed. Oliver, who had been watching him intently, raised himself on his arm and gazed at his gaoler. He was sleeping heavily; if this sleep could only be prolonged he might be able to make his way down to the door and escape. Noiselessly our hero crept from the bed, and stood upon his feet; almost at the same moment his eyes wandered to the mantel-piece, upon which there were several small phials and medicine-bottles. Upon one of these there was a label with "Laudanum" printed on it, and underneath, the word "Poison;" it contained but a few drops at most, and these he had soon poured into the bottle from which the Spaniard had filled his glass. No sooner done than there were symptoms of his waking, which warned Oliver to return to his place on the bed. This he did, and only just in time, for, after moving restlessly in his chair, the Spaniard sat upright, and poured himself out another glass from the bottle, which he followed, as before, with a second, and then relapsed into slumber again. Soon the laudanum was doing its work, and it was not long before he was lying huddled up on the floor, breathing with the heaviness of deep sleep, and utterly lost to all sense of external things. Oliver waited patiently, and then got up from the bed once more! his courage had come back to him, and he was determined to attempt to escape from the house at whatever risk. Treading on tiptoe, he made his way to the door, which creaked angrily on its

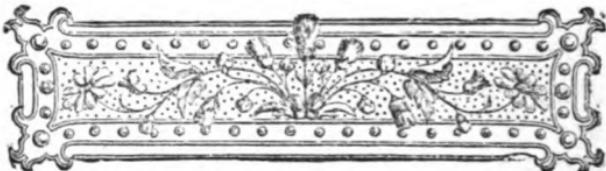
hinges as he opened it, and brought his heart into his mouth again. Then he turned round and looked at the Spaniard, but the noise had not disturbed him, he was sleeping as soundly as before, and moved neither hand nor muscle. Oliver made his way on to the landing, and paused to listen. He could hear the voices of the men in the large room below, and among them that of Mr. Benjamin Aaron making itself conspicuous above all the rest. Then he proceeded to descend the stairs. It seemed as if they were bent on betraying him, for they groaned and wheezed in a fashion that betokened their age and decrepitude. At last he stood in the passage through which he had first entered, and stole towards the door. A thrill of delight passed through his whole frame as he placed his fingers on the handle, a turn of which was to restore him to safety and liberty ; but in another moment his hopes were destroyed, when he found it was locked, and that the key had been taken away. Wildly groping upwards with his hands they came in contact with an iron bar that stretched across the door, and, before he could prevent it, it came rattling down with a noise and jangle, that sent all the inmates of the room at the end of the passage to their feet, and brought Mr. Benjamin Aaron out, in a state of hurry and consternation, fancying that the police had caught him at last. In the darkness, our hero rushed past him, and made upstairs as fast as he could, nearly stumbling on his nose as he bungled up over the rickety boards, for he knew that Mr. Aaron was close behind him, and that if he caught him, the results likely to

follow were too horrible to contemplate. In an agony of fear and despair, he darted back into the room in which he had left the Spaniard, and slamming the door to, turned the key in the lock. In an instant more Aaron was at the outside hammering violently at it, and clamouring for admission. Fortunately, the Spaniard still remained in his state of stupor, and was as insensible to the noise as if he had been dead. Oliver at once rushed to the window, opened it, and looked out ; it was very dark, but below he fancied he could see something like water. He never waited a moment, but scrambled out on the window-ledge. As he stretched out his hands the right one touched something that felt like a water-pipe ; if it had been a piece of cotton he could have trusted himself to it at that moment, so grasping it with the tenacity of despair, he swung off the window-sill and slowly dropped down by it. It was a desperate step, for as he went lower his arms ached terribly, and the skin peeled off his palms. Then suddenly a light gleamed at the window out of which he had escaped, and Mr. Benjamin Aaron's head appeared ; almost at the same moment he found that the water-pipe ceased, and before he could save himself, he was falling through the air, with death beneath him. The mate of the *Gipsy Queen* was in a fit of contemplation, gazing over the bulwarks of the ship, when his attention was suddenly arrested by a cry of distress, followed by a splash as of some one falling into the water. Gazing eagerly downward, his eyes caught sight of something struggling in the water.

He was gifted with plenty of pluck, that worthy mate of the good ship *Gipsy Queen*, and he was soon into a boat that lay at the side of the river, and, plunging into the water, presently returned on board, carrying the form of a young boy, who seemed as near drowned as could be.

Little did Oliver know that this was not the first night by many that he had slept within the wooden sides of the *Gipsy Queen!*





CHAPTER XX.

THE END OF THE SEARCH.

AMONG Oliver recovered his consciousness, for he had been in the water a good deal longer than was good for him, he was in the mate's berth, on board the *Gipsy Queen*, and the first person his eyes opened on was the ship's doctor, who, with his watch in one hand, and the other placed upon our hero's heart, was watching anxiously for those signs which would satisfy him that all danger was past. All cause for alarm, however, was now disposed of; and, with a long sleep and complete quiet, the patient would in twenty-four hours be himself again. Joe Barnes, the chief mate, was every inch of him a sailor and a gentleman; his only fault, if so it could be termed, was that he was too sensitive to other people's sufferings, and would make himself quite unhappy and depressed about the troubles of those to whom he was bound by no ties of any sort or kind. In fact, as his messmates used to say, he was a regular greenhorn in that respect, and was to be taken in by

anything that anybody liked to tell him. For fourteen years he had sailed backwards and forwards to Australia, and, as may easily be understood, in the course of those voyages had made a varied acquaintance among passengers, not a few of whom had tales of woe and misfortune to relate. These would be sure to be confided to Joe Barnes before the ship had been at sea a week, and by the time she had reached the line, he was a sort of walking repository of other people's unpleasant and melancholy reminiscences. He was standing at the doctor's side watching, with equal and much more openly-expressed eagerness, for signs of returning consciousness ; and when Oliver languidly raised his eyelids, a great sigh of relief escaped him, and he muttered, under his heavy moustache, "God be praised !"

"Go to sleep, my lad," whispered the doctor, soothingly, to our hero ; a suggestion that he speedily adopted, for in a few seconds more the closed eyes and the audible and regular breathing proclaimed that "nature's soft nurse" held him in her embrace.

"Well, Doctor," said Joe Barnes, when the pair of them had stepped out of the little cabin, and he had closed the door gently after them, "I'm right thankful for that ; my heart's been a thumping and a bumping up and down all the while you were looking so serious, for I knowed, by your face, it was a touch-and-go business."

"You are right, Joe," replied the doctor, "he had a narrow squeak, I can tell you. The muddy water of these docks was enough to poison him, as well as choke

him. But he's safe and sound enough now, if we keep him quiet."

"Aye, aye, Sir," nodded Joe, "he's snug and comfortable enough in my crib : no one won't interfere with him there."

"Well, good-night, Joe," said the doctor, moving away, "I'm going to turn in again ; and, if you take my advice, you'll do the same."

"I don't know as whether I shall," answered the mate ; "I'd rather not leave the youngster without some one being handy, in case he's took worse. Besides, I've had a good sleep as it is, and we've got to clear out of this at the flood-tide, which comes about half-past three."

"Well, Joe, you must do as you please," yawned the doctor, opening the door of his little cabin, "you know best, or think you do. If I were in your place I should say, bed." With that the speaker shut himself in, and in a very short time was snoring away with an exuberance of melody that would have done honour to a whole family of pigs.

As for Joe, he walked up the stairs on to the deck, and paced up and down awhile, occupying himself with reflection. Oliver's falling into the water and rescue, had made but little disturbance ; indeed, beyond the sailors on watch, the transaction was unknown to all on board the *Gipsy Queen* ; captain, crew, and passengers all had been, and still were, sound asleep, and slumbered on in ignorance of the dramatic incident that had occurred so near to them. The tenor of Joe's thoughts was as to

whence and by what means Oliver had got into the water. All he knew was, that standing looking over the bulwarks, he had heard a cry and a splash, close to the bows of the *Gipsy Queen*, and intuitively slipped over the side into the boat, that was opportunely at hand; he had, after groping about in the darkness, suddenly found his fingers grasping the hair of a human head, which, upon further investigation, he found to belong to our hero. As to the light at the open window in the top of one of the houses that stood at the edge of the dock, and the head that accompanied it, he had noticed neither one or the other, and, as I have said before, he was, consequently, altogether at a loss to comprehend by what possible means the boy could have tumbled into the water. "Time enough, however," he said to himself, "when I can get a direct answer from the lad." Then his reflections took a somewhat altered turn. What was to be done with Oliver? The ship was to clear out of the docks at half-past three that morning, then they were to drop down to Gravesend, and take in such of the passengers as had not already come on board, and sail with the next tide for Sydney. A good idea! The boy could go as far as Gravesend, by which time he would, no doubt, be sufficiently recovered to say who he was, and where he lived, and then he, Joe, would get one of his pilot friends to safely convey him home, wherever that might be. This was the best course, and he settled upon adopting it at once.

Hardly had the clock at the dock-gate struck three, before there was a general movement observable on board

the *Gipsy Queen*; lights made themselves visible through the ports, and feet began to patter over the deck. On the quay, also, certain dusky forms might be seen hurrying to and fro, waving lanterns, and chattering noisily, now and then shouting out something that was answered from the ship. Presently there came a creaking of rope, and rattling of chains, followed by the measured "click-clack" of the capstan, and the tread of the men as they walked round and round it; and thus slowly drew the bow of the *Gipsy Queen* to the dock-gate, which now stood open, leaving the way clear to the river, where an impatient tug, hissing and panting with its steam lungs, was waiting to hook on and draw the vessel to her moorings at Gravesend. The sparks from her funnel darted up through the chill morning, while the white smoke, as if damped by the heavy dew that was falling, spread itself lazily in a cloud, and hung mid air. Slowly the ship crept through the entrance to where the tug lay, and soon the tow rope had been adjusted, and the steam lungs breathed unchecked, gasping in their earlier throbs, as the weight of the *Gipsy Queen* made itself felt, but growing more regular with each inspiration, as the impetus given her lessened the strain. Thus from her resting place, out upon the water once more, the good ship speeds forth upon yet another crusade against the winds and waves. She is no novice at the work; you and I, reader, have known her before, and she glides on as proudly as ever, dashing and gallant in her mien. If wood had sense and feeling, this brave old ship might well be vain and puffed-up, for her services are long and

distinguished, and competent judges declare her to be the finest craft afloat. "Well done, old girl," her captain would often say, when in some squall in the tropics she had weathered a hurricane of wind and sea. To him she was wife, children, and everything. He and she together had looked death in the face, when it was a question of judgment and coolness with him, and of stout timber and steadiness for her; and he knew her so well, what she was capable of, and how enduring she could be, that never yet had they blundered. And now once again to the battle; would it end as well as of yore, or would it—? but that the storm fiend alone knows.

The ship was lying comfortably off Gravesend; the few passengers that had to come aboard were rapidly arriving, and the owner of the *Gipsy Queen* was giving his final directions to the captain, preparatory to taking himself ashore, and getting back to his office in London. In fact it was past two o'clock, and a splendid September day, with a nice fresh breeze blowing across the Essex marshes, and every appearance and promise of fine weather. Joe Barnes had been so busy ever since the ship left the dock, that he had forgotten all about our hero, who still slept on in the mate's cabin, but about this period he suddenly remembered him, and at his first opportunity he hurried downstairs. Oliver, with praiseworthy obedience to the doctor's orders, was still slumbering in a peaceful and healthy fushion, refreshing even to a beholder.

"Well," said Joe to himself, "I'm bothered if I know

what to do. It seems a pity to wake up the young 'un, but there ain't over and above much time before we are off, and, at present, I don't know where he hails from, or to whom he belongs."

There was a tap at the door of the cabin, followed by a voice, saying, "The skipper wants to see you, please."

"All right," replied Joe, "I'm coming directly. Hollo, I say," he added, as the thought struck him to ask somebody's advice in his difficulty, and, throwing open the door, "what's to be done about this;" and then he rattled off a full account of the last night's business to the man he had called back, who was dressed in a way that showed him to be one of the crew. "Just look at the lad," continued Joe, drawing back the curtain, and disclosing Master Oliver to the full view of his companion, who, no sooner than his eyes lighted on the boy's face, pressed eagerly forward, exclaiming, "What! Oliver here?" Joe Barnes dropped back a step, and looked on astonished.

But if you and I, reader, had been present, we should have felt no surprise, for that other man was William Warner!

Thus, by a mere accident, which nearly proved fatal, Oliver was able to discharge his mission, and, though he still knew it not, had found him of whom he had been sent in search by Mona. It did not take very long for William Warner to explain to Joe how Oliver was known to him, and they were both agreed at the end of the story that the doctor should be asked whether any harm

could be done by waking our hero, which Warner undertook to inquire, while Joe went and saw the captain.

To make a long business short, Oliver was aroused, and the first face he saw was William Warner's. Over this part of my story I need not linger; suffice it that our hero, as best his weak state would allow him, declared that nothing and nobody should make him leave Warner again until he had taken him back to Barnslade. Ultimately the captain was called in and consulted, and the whole matter was laid before him. In the result, the *Gipsy Queen* sailed from Gravesend, bound to Sidney, with both Warner and Oliver on board; the latter under an engagement to the captain to make himself useful about the ship when he got strong again; the former working before the mast as a common seaman—thus paying his passage money out to the new country, leaving, as he hoped, the terrible secret of his life buried in England, to rise ghostlike and remorseless no more. As the tide bore the good ship, *Gipsy Queen*, over the river's bosom, homeward-bound, with that lonely woman on board, sitting apart from the rest, and holding her baby-boy of the big, blue eyes in her arms, so now it carries that brave vessel towards the sea again, and outward-bound with that same boy of hers with the eyes as of yore, but no longer the baby, to whom she is but a dim shadow of the past, formless, featureless, passionless. Yet there is one near to him, who, at this moment, is holding his hand, who could, from memory, sketch every lineament of her face, and who prays that in the dread hereafter he and she may meet again. Thus the tide

ebbs and flows day after day, year after year, and will until this world of ours is swept into chaos. How strange that it should glide backwards and forwards with calm, emotionless regularity, when it supplies the setting to so many stirring incidents and events.

* * * * *

A day had passed, and the *Gipsy Queen* was speeding down the Channel with a favouring breeze. The night drew on, and the wind freshened so much that the topsail had to be taken in, and sail generally shortened. Neither the captain nor Joe liked the look of the weather. There were heavy clouds gathering, and the sea grew angry, while the "white horses" galloped defiantly on the crests of the waves. By midnight there was a terrible storm, and the *Gipsy Queen* was scudding along with bare poles, and the speed of a racehorse, through the dark, pitchy gloom, in which a man could not see his own hand. Passengers had been sent below long before, and, as can easily be understood, were far from happy in their imprisonment; all hands were on deck, but they spoke scarcely a word one to another; each was at his post, prepared to perform his share of duty, and awaiting orders. Joe Barnes was himself at the helm, with another man, while the captain bent eagerly over the compass. He never felt before as he did now: hitherto he had always been confident in the seaworthiness of his vessel, but seas were very different to the open sea, and a fair fight with the waves and the tempest had driven them

in unpleasant contiguity to the coast. He knew every inch of his road down the Channel, and, as far as his calculation enabled him to form an opinion, they must be somewhere off the Gorston Lighthouse, which stood on a point not very far from the fishing village of Herringbourne. But the thought of Herringbourne made the captain start. As a sort of bar to the bay in which it lay, there was a long ledge of sands, that had sent many a good ship to its account; and the *Gipsy Queen* was being driven thitherwards.

"Captain," said Joe, under his breath, "look to the leeward; there no mistaking that."

High up in the sky—it could not be any very great distance off—at momentary intervals appeared a bright, glaring light, that made itself plainly visible through the gloom, and tempest of wind and rain. "Keep away, keep away," it seemed to say, "and be warned in time."

The captain gnawed his nails and stamped his feet, when he felt how powerless he was: no sail would have stood for a moment, and all that could be done was to keep the vessel as straight as possible, and trust to her being carried past the sands. There was no fear in his heart, but a conviction was fast growing within him, that he and the *Gipsy Queen* would part company that night for ever.

"She'll never do it, Captain," whispered Joe, "the gale's driving her away a point every time. It's all up with the poor old girl, and with us, too, for the matter of that."

"Quiet, Joe," said the captain. "See that the guns are loaded," he added, turning to Warner, who happened to be standing near to him, "and order them to have the rockets, and port fires ready."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when there came a terrible shock, that shook the stout frame of the *Gipsy Queen* from stem to stern.

A few moments more and she was on the Herringbourne sands, with the angry sea doing its best to knock her to pieces.

* * * * *

Uncle Oliver sat up in his bed, rubbed his eyes, and listened. Was it fancy, or did he hear the *boom! boom!* of minute guns? He strained his ears again, and in another instant he was out and upon his legs, dressing himself with all speed. The old pluck of his sailor days was as strong as ever within him, and if life was in danger to-night, and it could be saved by hook or by crook, he would not be behindhand in helping. How he tumbled into his clothes, putting his shirt on the wrong side, and getting into his trousers the wrong way, with other eccentricities of a curious and complicated character, it is unnecessary to relate; but it was not very long before he was the centre of an admiring group of fishermen upon the beach, who he harangued, and worked up into a state of enthusiasm, the result of which shall be presently told.

Meanwhile, the *Gipsy Queen* was fast breaking up.



CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE OLIVER TO THE RESCUE.

ET is wonderful how strength of will and courage in one man will inspire others with a kindred feeling of pluck and determination. But there are some who are born to be leaders of their fellows. Uncle Oliver and the Herringbourne fishermen, at the end of a very few seconds, thoroughly understood one another, and there was no hesitation either on the one side or the other as to what *must* be done. There was no lifeboat stationed at Herringbourne, for the inhabitants were not rich enough to build or buy one for themselves, and as yet, nobody had in a sudden fit of generosity taken upon himself to make them such a desirable present. Still, though thus placed at a disadvantage, the fishermen had never been behindhand in succouring and rescuing the shipwrecked ; and some of them were fond of declaring, that for dryness and safety they liked their own beach luggers "a deal better than all your new-fangled inventions, which capsize when you least

expect them." But on this particular night, when the *Gipsy Queen* had got upon the sands, a sea was running and breaking its huge waves upon the shore in a fashion that plainly warned them how almost hopeless it was to dream of getting near to the wreck in an open boat. They were a fine hardy set of fellows those same fishermen, but as they looked one another in the face, when Uncle Oliver appealed to them to help him "to get afloat in something or other," there was an expression in their eyes which plainly bespoke their knowledge of the magnitude of his request. Then, as they turned and saw the brave old man, his white hair peeping out from underneath the sou'-wester he had borrowed from one of them, and in every respect perfectly calm and collected, nor lip nor muscle quivering, they hesitated no longer, but one and all shouted, "We'll go, sir!" God rest you mothers and little ones through this night of storm and peril for your dearest and best loved, and rock you to sleep to find them returned safe and sound in the morning! True to their Maker and their fellow-men, they shrank not from facing death like heroes, and surely enough to each of them there came strength equal to the occasion. Aye, truly, it sometimes seems as if the Almighty created dangers for His offspring to glorify His handiwork, by showing the stuff out of which they are made.

It was a hard struggle even to get the lugger afloat; as she hit her head against the breakers they drove her back, and, though the hawser did its duty and proved staunch and sound, it seemed like enough that the craft

would have a hole knocked in her side before she got off. Yet the two men in the bow bravely and sternly did their duty; drenched and dripping, with the salt spray glistening in their beard and singing in their ears, they clung to the thwarts with one hand, while with the other they held fast to the rope upon whose stability so much depended. As thus they did battle with nature and defied her to her worst, while the wind, as if redoubling its exertions, shrieked with the wildness of a woman in hysterics, and seemed to be bidden by some unseen spirit, thus to combine with all the other elements against these pretentious combatants. But yet they shrank not nor feared, and after long-tried patience and perseverance the opportunity came, and the lugger, propelled by twelve stout arms, floated. None spoke; it may be that the heart of each man was in his mouth and choked his utterance; but in silence, amid the roar of the wind, the fight of the waters, the hissing and pelting of the drenching rain, they struggled with sinew and muscle towards that bourne, whence they hoped at least to bring some traveller back with them. Aye, children, it was something to remember to see those good, brave Christians, with only their God above and beneath them in all His terrible omnipotence, courageous, enduring, giants in nerve and strength, only because He who never faileth had made a way for them to escape that they might be able to undergo the trial. If one above others among that gallant crew could be described as more brave than his companions that man was Uncle Oliver. With his hand on the tiller, and a pulse as calm

as calm could be, he watched for the flash of the minute gun, when the boat rose on the crest of the waves, so that he might keep her head in the right direction. No one knew better than he the danger of the enterprise on which he was bound, but fear was a thing he had never known, and he had been in some ugly storms at sea in his lifetime. The progress the rowers made was but slow, and no wonder, for at each stroke they were driven back, within but a very few inches, as far as they had advanced. Still, though the sweat poured down their bronzed cheeks, and their brawny arms ached again, they relaxed not in the least, and presently the boat was passing the head of the jetty, which ran out some little way into the sea, over whose ancient timbers the waves broke at frequent intervals with a crash that threatened to sweep it bodily to destruction. At the extreme end burned a red lamp intended, when the boats were out fishing, to act as a guiding star to show the direction in which home lay. To-night it flickered and shifted in a way that told that the wind had found its way inside through some crack or aperture, yet still it burned on sufficiently brightly to betray a picture to Uncle Oliver that gave him a terrible shock as he gazed upon it. Clinging to the lamp-post, with one foot on a rickety seat and the other upon the upper rail of the jetty, Janet, her long hair unloosed and floating on the wind, in a wild and wayward freak of her strange nature, stood waving her hand and shouting forth words of encouragement. As the lugger, propelled by a huge wave, drove past the end of the jetty, Uncle Oliver heard the voice as

of a spirit exclaiming, "God go with you, dear Uncle Oliver," which not only caught his ear, but those of his companions, and then, as if by inspiration, all murmured "Amen." Aye, never was "Amen" added to a worthier prayer, and you, my children, will I know echo it heartily.

The raging sea was making short work of the *Gipsy Queen*, and all on board had prepared themselves for the inevitable death that stared them in the face with a cold, resolute stolidity that shut out every ray of hope. In such a time as this it was a grand sight to see the calm courage of the captain and crew, of whom only one had shown the white feather, and bitterly did he now repent his weakness, as, shivering and skulking in a corner, even in death he was denied the sympathy that bound all the rest together. With the passengers the first horrors of their approaching fate were subdued, and in solemn and sacred silence fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers awaited the eternity that was hastening towards them.

For the boats of the *Gipsy Queen* had been either crushed or damaged in the earlier part of the gale, and the only sound one they had attempted to launch was dashed against the ship's side and rendered useless !

* * * * * *

The grey dawn was straggling over the waters, as wearily and in sad silence the lugger dragged its way towards the shore. The fury of the gale was spent now, and, as if tired out with its night's frolic, the wind had lulled till scarcely a breath could be felt. What a con-

trast to its warring and bellowing but a few hours since. It had done its terrible work well—not a vestige of the brave clippership *Gipsy Queen* remained, save in the shape of bits of spars and portions of her timbers that drifted hither and thither on the surface of the sea, and only showed the more plainly how thoroughly the business of destruction had been accomplished. And only two rescued out of all that brave company who had sailed in her from Gravesend, and those two now lying drenched and exhausted side by side at the bottom of the lugger. Despite their arduous exertions the brave fishermen had been unable to get near the wreck in time, and, in an agony of disappointment and despair, saw the ship suddenly heel over and disappear from view. When they reached the breakers, that crashed with the sound of thunder upon the sand, not a trace of her remained; in one fell swoop, as the hawk bears down upon its prey, a mighty billow had engulfed the unfortunate vessel and her living freight. Defying the dangers that menaced them, they lingered as near to the spot with the lugger as circumstances would allow, and thus, by a lucky chance, rescued these two they now had on board. As the rays of the morning light fell upon the faces of Uncle Oliver, and his comrades, they found their way to the bottom of the boat, and roused one of these two from the state of torpor. Raising himself on one arm, he gazed upward at Uncle Oliver, who, still at the helm, was guiding the lugger's bow for the head of the jetty.

Those two, who of all on board the *Gipsy Queen* alone

were saved, were none other than William Warner and our hero Oliver!

Of course, heroes are always pulled out of danger by the skin of their teeth, and it was not likely I was going to make an exception of mine. A pretty kettle of fish I should have found myself in with my children if I had allowed Master Oliver to be drowned, to say nothing of destroying the whole plot of my story, which, of course, as every proper story should, could do nothing but end happily. As for William Warner, I am quite sure that it would have been held to be a most unwarrantable proceeding on my part if I had permitted him to go to Davy Jones's Locker.

"You'd better be still and rest yourself, my man," said Uncle Oliver. "You've had a rough time of it, and so has the youngun, and rest is the best medicine for folks in your condition."

"You're very kind, sir," replied Warner, rising to his feet, and then sitting down on the seat by Uncle Oliver's side, "but I feel right again now, though I shouldn't so much mind a thorough change of clothing: they do say that a wetting with salt water never gives cold, but I'm bound to confess it makes one uncommonly chilly."

"We shan't be long now, mate, in getting ashore," interposed the man who was pulling the stroke oar, "and I can soon give you a rig out when we're there."

Warner smiled gratefully; and, almost at the same moment, Oliver woke up, and giving his eyes a preliminary rub, looked about to try and comprehend where he was. The faces of the fishermen puzzled him

greatly, but when he saw Warner, the events of the night started up before him, and he thoroughly understood his position.

Another quarter-of-an-hour's row and the bow of the boat grated on the beach. I need hardly add that none delayed in jumping ashore, only too glad to find their feet on *terra firma* once again. Uncle Oliver, leading our hero by the hand, was making his way up over the sands towards his lodgings, followed by William Warner, when suddenly a young lady rushed into his arms, and, smothering him with kisses, exclaimed, "You dear, good, darling old boy, I do so love you"—after which the kissing was renewed. But when the operation was concluded, a most extraordinary and unexpected scene was enacted. Oliver, his cheek flushed and his eye bright with excitement, in the most unceremonious and inexplicable fashion, dashed up to the young lady's side, and flinging his arms round her neck, hugged and kissed her with a vigour and vehemence, which so flabbergasted the old sailor, that for a minute he remained speechless. At length he screamed out—

"Hullo, you sir, what's the meaning of this?"

"The meaning, sir, is," replied our hero, "that I have at last found my dear sister Janet."

Janet, who of course was the aforesaid young lady, but who, till the moment these words were uttered, was as scandalised by these proceedings as Uncle Oliver, directly she heard his voice extricated herself from his embrace, and holding him out at arms' length gazed eagerly into his face. Then a repetition of the arm-

flinging business took place, the young lady on this occasion being the operator, as she exclaimed "Dear, dear Oliver!"

Altogether the scene was a highly interesting and sensational one, and excited the admiration of a select circle of the fishermen and their wives, who had come down to the shore to meet them on their return from their perilous enterprise. It required no very elaborate or lengthy explanation from Janet to inform Uncle Oliver that the long-lost and long-sought-for Oliver had been found; and that in addition to the one glorious surprise he already had in store for Sam and Aunt Sally, which was like enough to send them both crazy with joy, he now had another, which would be little less delightful.

For has it not been told how Sam grieved for the boy he had snatched from a terrible death and brought up as his own son; and though we have lost sight of him for some time, the brave fireman, now retired from active life, still longs in his heart to see the lad's pleasant face. And so of course does Aunt Sally, though she says but little about it, for she is a woman of strong faith, and believes that, sooner or later, all will come right again; and the strayed lamb will find his way back.

I warrant you that it was a pleasant tea-party assembled at Uncle Oliver's lodgings that evening—the old sailor himself, Janet, Oliver, and William Warner. The latter had lost all his shyness, and was thoroughly at home with his host, who had taken an immense fancy to him for all his kindness and goodness to our hero, a full account of which that young gentleman had availed himself of his

first opportunity to detail in language of the most eloquent and touching description.

"But the praise mustn't be all one way," said Warner, when our hero had exhausted his panegyrics; "I owe my life to Olly, and I've only repaid the debt in a proper and respectable manner." And then he told them all about the struggle at the Weir, and how Oliver had come to the rescue just in the nick of time. Whereat Janet, who was sitting next to our hero, drew her chair closer than before, and gazed devotedly at him with those eyes which once seemed shrouded in eternal darkness. Presently, she took hold of his hand and pressed it tenderly between her own; in short, she petted and made much of him, to the extent that excited the jealousy of Uncle Oliver, and evoked a reference on his part to "coffee, pistols," and like methods to settle the claims of assuming pretenders to his Janet's affections, which excited no end of fun and chaffing, to say nothing of roars of laughter, that made the landlady below quite angry because she was not in the joke. However, tea, like everything else, also came to an end at last, and Uncle Oliver and Warner were enjoying themselves with a pipe, while Janet and Oliver stood at the window watching the darkness growing up over the sea—that darkness which last night was a pall for so many human souls. Though all Uncle Oliver's party had been able to smile and laugh in the plenitude of their new-found happiness, let it not be supposed that they had forgotten those whom the storm had swept into destruction. "One shall be taken and the other left," saith the Preacher; and so it had been

with them in terrible truth realised, for out of the two hundred aboard the *Gipsy Queen* they alone remained to tell the tale. How unlikely, then, that the thought of their great preservation should be absent from them, or those who loved them now, or until that day when the sea gives up its dead. Need I add that Oliver, as he stood at the window with Janet's hand in his, murmured from the depths of his young heart an earnest prayer of thanksgiving to his God, for His goodness and mercy !

The dusk was dwindling into the darkness of night, but still Uncle Oliver and Warner sat peacefully smoking, and occasionally conversing, while Janet and Oliver remained in the same position at the window, whispering softly one to another and wondering many things ! By-and-by there came a tap at the door, which seemed intended rather as a warning than an inquiry, for the visitor followed it by entering without waiting for a reply.

"What, all in the dark!" ejaculated the new comer, who was no other than Mrs. Mortimer ; "I never saw such strange people as you two are. I wonder you do not pull down the blinds to complete the picture."

She had uttered but these few words, and Uncle Oliver was handing her a chair, when she perceived there were strangers, or at least a stranger, in the room ; and no wonder, for at the first sound of her voice Warner had sprung to his feet, and was now beside her, holding her arm with the grasp of a vice.

"Charlotte Blundell," he exclaimed in a hoarse

whisper, "do we meet again, or is it a dream? Can it be that justice will be done me at last?"

As she heard these words Mrs. Mortimer rose quietly from her seat, and then, as if the effort had been too much for her, she sank back into it again with a sigh. "Yes, Arthur Mordaunt, and should have been years ago," she murmured. "It is well we have met, that the great wrong you have endured and suffered may be repaired."

"God bless you for those words," cried Warner, "they are more precious to me than life!"

All of which conversation was heard by Uncle Oliver and Janet in blank astonishment, and by Oliver with almost equal amazement. The situation was exceedingly dramatic, but there was nothing within their knowledge which led up to it to make it comprehensible, and, consequently, their sensations may be better imagined than described. Nor was the mystery rendered more intelligible to them by Warner's proposing that he and Mrs. Blundell should take a stroll along the road by the sea—a suggestion to which she acceded without a murmur. "Blundell," muttered Janet to herself; "surely I have heard that name somewhere before. Blundell," she repeated again, and whispered it to herself several times, but, as yet, memory supplied her with no clue. Meanwhile Warner and Mrs. Mortimer, as they had known her, had gone out of the room, and were walking out in the moonlight, conversing earnestly one with another. As for Uncle Oliver he returned sulkily to his pipe, inwardly declaring that everybody else was a lunatic,

and unworthy the notice of a sensible man like himself; with which satisfactory reflection I leave him to fall into his usual nap.

It was such a lovely night, that Janet and Oliver did not wait very long before they likewise took themselves out of doors, and over the sands down to the edge of the sea, which sparkled and glittered in the silver moonlight. What a revolution had taken place in the course of a few hours ; it seemed hardly possible that the now smiling face was so short a time since convulsed and distorted with passion, and destruction written on its every feature, or that it had dealt death to hundreds without remorse or pity. The voice of the waters scarcely made itself audible as they trickled on to the soft sand, or slipped back beneath the next ripple that fell ; in fact, it was one of those nights when man loves to be abroad to gaze in admiration and delight on the beauties of nature. Janet and Oliver wandered some little way along the shore, and then sat down upon the sands close to the water, and there he told her all that had happened to him ; how Rhomboid and Brownlow had kidnapped him ; how he had worked at the factory ; how Mona had sent him to find William Warner ; how he had again been kidnapped and escaped ; and how he had thus got on board the *Gipsy Queen*; to all of which Janet listened with the most profound attention—save perhaps to that part where Oliver paused to express his admiration and love for Mona, an avowal of sentiment of which she did not altogether approve. In fact, as a faithful historian, it is my duty to state that there were

unmistakeable indications at either corner of her mouth of what is known as a pout, and she rather relaxed the warmth of the grasp in which she had hitherto held Oliver by the hand. So, so, Miss Janet, you are jealous, are you?—that is something quite new for you; I wonder what it all means?

While thus they sat, the sea cast at their feet a strange waif from its bosom: a dead man, with a child fastened round his neck, just as, when in answer to a shrieking mother's wild entreaties, he had secured the infant to him firmly by a stout rope, and determined to make a desperate effort to swim to land, had plunged into the sea. But the fight had been too fierce for him, though long before he had given in the pitiful cries of his helpless burden had been silenced. Yet he never thought to loose the cord that bound them together, but struggled on and on till exhaustion came, and then numbness, and then insensibility, and then death. A noble ending for Joe Barnes; such a one as those who knew him might have expected of him, and could have read many a time in the open, brave look of that face which now lies calm and still in the pale moonlight, as peaceful in expression as if he had gone to his eternal rest in his sleep.

The morning of the day upon which Uncle Oliver and his party left Herringbourne for London, a small procession passed through the gate of the old churchyard, and in a quiet corner the good mate of the *Gipsy Queen* was laid in his last bed. And the little one he had sought

to save was placed in the coffin beside him. For Uncle Oliver would not have it otherwise.

Verily, in the dread hereafter, a vision rises of a child's spirit guiding a kindred soul through the gates of Paradise !





CHAPTER XXII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THE may be remembered that when Brownlow found his secret cupboard broken open, the contents abstracted, and Oliver nowhere to be found, he rushed to the not altogether unnatural conclusion that our hero had stolen his money. When the first transport of his passion had cooled down, and he was sufficiently calm to reflect, it took no very long time for him to come to a determination to put the matter at once in the hands of the police, so as to arrest the culprit before he had got rid of any of the money. There was, however, one thing that excited a deep sense of apprehension within his bosom, which was that among the other bank notes which had been taken there was one for £50., which, unless judiciously handled, might lead to certain unpleasant inquiries being instituted. The thought of this, however, only stimulated him the more to immediate action, and hurrying out of the house, he made his way as fast as his legs would carry him to the

police-station, where he was soon closeted with the Inspector on duty.

Jerry, who remained behind at Mill Lane with the cripple, was not very long before he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with the cause of this extraordinary conduct on Brownlow's part, as to which point having satisfied himself, he proceeded to indulge in a dance expressive of the most intense delight in front of the shattered cupboard, but he was suddenly arrested in the midst of his gyrations by a cry of pain from the Cripple, who, with his hand placed upon his heart, had fallen upon the nearest chair, and looked even then as if he were dying. Tenderly taking Mike up in his arms, Jerry scrambled as best he could under the weight upstairs, to the little bed-room they had so long shared. Gently he laid him down, and first unloosing his collar, then sprinkled his forehead ; but for some moments he lay motionless. Jerry would have run for the doctor, but he dared not leave his friend alone ; terrible was the suspense he endured, until at last Mike opened his eyes and fixed them upon the earnest anxious face beside him.

"Jerry," he whispered feebly, "it's coming at last, and I'm not frightened nor sorry, for I'm very weary—so weary. I knew it wouldn't be very long, for my legs and my back have ached more than ever these last few weeks."

"But Mickey, dear," entreated Jerry, "do let me go and fetch the doctor, or somebody. I'm sure he would soon set you all right again. You've been a doing too much to-day, and that's why you feel a bit queer."

With that Jerry made a movement towards the door, but the Cripple caught him by the arm and stayed him.

"No, Jerry," he said—his voice firmer than before—"it's no use, I know. I am dying, and nothing can save me. I'd rather be alone with you, who have always been so good and kind to me, than have anyone else near me. Dear Jerry," he went on, raising himself with an effort, and flinging his arms round the boy's neck, who was now kneeling at the bed-side, "the only thing that makes me sorry to die is to leave you, because I can never, never, never repay you for all you've done for me. I can't cry," he continued, noticing the tears that ran down Jerry's cheeks, "for I feel quite happy and contented. Dear Jerry, do you remember when you stood between me and Brownlow, and got the blow that he meant for me? Ah, that was good and brave of you, for he strikes hard."

Then they came a sudden pause, terrible in its silence, only broken by Jerry's choking sobs; and next the arms, that had clung round his neck, loosened, and the Cripple's head fell back again upon his pillow.

Not quite gone yet, but soon!

Feeling as one who is blind, Mike groped on the coverlet with his thin wasted hand till it rests upon Jerry's, and then, as a child who has found a cherished plaything, a smile stole over his face, and he caught it eagerly in his fingers.

"Come into the green fields, Jerry," he whispered, "down to the old tree by the river; it's past factory time, and Brownlow's gone for the day. I don't want

any tea, do you? There are such splendid cowslips. I know you won't tell the others, will you, for they'd go and pick them all? Come, Jerry, come."

A little mouse who had a hole in the corner of the room, and whom the two boys had fed till he became quite tame and friendly, slipped out from his hiding-place, and climbing nimbly up the counterpane, which hung down to the floor, sat himself at the end of the bed, and gazed anxiously at what was going on; then, as he heard a rough step on the stairs, and saw a cruel face at the open door, he turned himself round and hurried back again.

"What are you about?" roughly inquired the owner of the face; "haven't you both given me trouble enough to-day, without carrying on any more of yer antics? I'll be hanged if I don't make an example of you Mike." Suiting the action to the word, he took a step forward, but in an instant Jerry bounded to his feet, and, in a voice hoarse with emotion, shouted, "Stand back, man; you drove him hard enough when he was alive, but you can't harm him no longer, for he's dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Brownlow, horror-stricken, and turning away.

"Yes, governor, dead as poor Jemmy." Through the long hours of darkness Jerry sat by the bed-side where rested the body of the Cripple, with no fellow-mourner or watcher but a tiny mouse, who came and nestled under his hand, as if anxious to show his sympathy.

Yet again, George Brownlow, crouching in a corner of his room below stairs, thinks and thinks on through

the night, and over him flutters the shadow of a vengeance that shall come upon him swiftly and soon !

* * * * *

It had afforded no little satisfaction to the factory people to see Brownlow pitched into by Mr. Lloyd in the way described in a previous chapter, for he was anything but a favourite, and had a great many more enemies than friends. Consequently, when he appeared at his loom as usual the next day, but without either of the boys, not a few chuckled to notice his downcast look, and rejoiced that there was some one at last who could exercise authority over him. For many a time before this, several of the hands had remonstrated with him on his harsh usage of the lads, but, with a cold sneer, and a hint to them "to mind their own business, and trouble themselves about themselves, and not with other people's affairs," he would turn his back upon them. But on the morning succeeding the night in the course of which such a sad drama had been played out at his house in Mill Lane, it was commonly observed that Brownlow seemed singularly depressed and down in the mouth, and unusually inclined to converse with his fellow workers. But the more genial he attempted to be, the more they shrank from him, till his manner became almost servile in his endeavour to make himself agreeable. This, my children, is part of the just punishment of those who have ridden the high horse and ground down their fellows: when they want sympathy they can get none; when they seek consideration it is refused them; when they ask for pity no one will extend it to them.

As the leper is avoided as a loathsome thing, and driven forth into desolate places, so they, shut out from communion with their kind, are left to perish in solitude and alone, with no creature to tend their last hour, or smooth the pillow of their death-bed. Thus, in the midst of that busy work-room, Brownlow sat despised and hated, a victim to his own bitter thoughts. Presently, a strange man came in at the same door through which Mr. Lloyd had entered the afternoon before, and walked straight up to Brownlow, into whose ear he whispered, "We have found the thief, and he is now in custody at the station ; you had best come and charge him."

Again some of the evil fire lit up Brownlow's eye, and with a defiant glare he rose to his feet, and followed the messenger out.

"I suppose it's the boy ?" he muttered to his companion, who seemed little inclined to hold any conversation with him. "I thought he couldn't be far off."

"Don't suppose nothing," was the reply ; "you'll see plenty soon enough."

Thus up Barnslade High Street to the police-station, which stood at the further end, a terror to all evil doers, with its huge "Hue and Cry" placards posted on boards either side of the entrance door, and stout bars protecting each of the windows, mounting quickly up the stone steps, Brownlow followed his conductor along a narrow passage to a room at the further end, where he found several persons assembled, most of them constables in uniform, and in one corner he saw a human figure crouching in a huddled-up attitude, resting his arms upon

his knees, and presenting an exceedingly draggled and disreputable appearance.

"That's him," said the man who had brought him from the factory, pointing towards the figure. "Now then, stupid," he added, going up to it, and giving it a shake that would have awakened the seven sleepers; "wake up and pull yourself together; the gent's here as is a going to prosecute you. It's only polite for you to let him see your handsome face."

The figure gave a grunt, then shook itself, made a pretence of rising, and failing, immediately relapsed into its former attitude. But the official audience were not to be treated in this fashion, and the assistance of three stout pairs of arms soon placed the drowsy one on his feet, and held him there.

"Hold up your head," said the first constable, carrying out his own order by placing his hand under the man's chin, and lifting it up, till it brought the prisoner's face into view. The spectacle presented was a melancholy one; alas how had the mighty fallen! Here was the once elegantly classical and mathematical Theophilus Rhomboid reduced to the position of a criminal; and what made matters still worse was, he was so intoxicated he could hardly see, much less understand what was passing.

"This morning," said the constable, "I was on duty, when I saw this here man was much the worse for liquor. I remonstrated with him, as he was a halloaing and yelling frightful, but it weren't no use, so I took him into custody, and brought him here. When he was searched,

a lot of money was found on him, principally bank notes, corresponding in numbers to those lost by this gentleman," pointing to Brownlow, "besides a considerable sum in gold. I haven't asked him to account for them yet, because I don't suppose he could give an intelligible answer."

Brownlow for a few moments was completely speechless, by reason of the varied emotions that fluctuated within him. If he gave the man into custody, he would likely enough expose everything ; if he did not, the police would just as likely take the matter in their own hands, and compel him to prosecute. At any rate, for a few hours at least, no great harm could be done to Rhomboid by putting him under lock and key ; probably by that course being taken he would get the sooner sober, and some settlement would be come to.

"I can't believe he intended to rob me," whined Brownlow ; "he must have done it in one of his drunken freaks."

"Drunken freaks be hanged !" growled the constable ; "the law don't excuse a man when he's drunk, any more than it does when he's sober."

"I should like to see the notes that were found on him," said Brownlow, so that I may be quite sure they are mine."

There was one thought uppermost at that moment in his mind, and that was, if possible, to get hold of that one single bank note that might possibly lead to such unpleasant disclosures about himself. So he walked up to the Inspector's desk, upon which the various things found

upon Rhomboid were lying, and took up a small roll, which he carried to the window on the pretence of examining it more carefully by the light. At the very top lay the one slip of thin paper he would give the world to secure ; without pausing to think, he crushed it between his fingers, and tried to slip in into his pocket. But a stern grasp stayed his arm, for at his elbow stood the imperturbable constable who had fetched him from the factory.

"Put it back," he said. "We don't allow parties to take back their own things until after the trial's over. Property found on prisoners is always kept till it's been identified by the owners afore the court and the judge."

And back with the rest, Bank of England note 00035, for £50, was placed !

For the present Rhomboid was bundled away into a side room, and there laid upon a long wooden bench, to sleep off the effects of his potations, which, though it was still daylight, I am bound to say had been exceedingly deep. Meanwhile Brownlow, too unsettled in mind to return to the factory and work, wandered purposeless out into those meadows by the river in which the cripple had so loved to idle away the summer days. Depend upon it, for him who has lived an evil life, and done ill to his fellows, there can be no greater punishment than to consign him to the companionship of his own bitter thoughts. All his wickednesses and crimes rise like spectres before him, and wave their hands ominously at him, till the picture becomes too terrible to look upon, and, pressing his fingers upon his eyes, he

cries for mercy and pardon. It is well that we human beings have not to judge fellow mortals such as these ; I fear that if our chances of forgiveness were to depend upon our forgiveness of them, it would be next to hopeless. But fortunately there is a great Spirit, with whom the worst and most degraded can find a hearing for their petitions, and tender compassion, if they repent and are heartily sorry for all their misdoings.

With bent back and drooping eyes, late that evening George Brownlow stole back through the streets of Barnslade, to his house in Mill Lane. He shuddered as he thought of what lay so calm and still in the little room up-stairs, and a cold tremor spread itself over his body as the door that led into the lane slammed behind him. He seemed to be entering a grave, so silent was everything, and as he passed into his own room his teeth chattered with the chill of fear that was upon him.

What was it that made him shriek wildly, and then fall prostrate on the floor. Seemingly sitting on a chair by the fire-place, with the light of the moon streaming in through the window upon it, there was a tiny figure with wings, whose whiteness was almost dazzling, and whose face was the face of Mike the cripple. It was but an apparition conjured up by the whirling brain of Brownlow, as ghosts and ghosts have been created, and will be to the end of all things, by the overwrought imaginations of mortals.

* * * * *

The great Rhomboid had not passed a very pleasant night of it. Returning consciousness had made him

aware of two disagreeable facts—first, that he had a very bad headache; and next, that he was in the contemptible position of a criminal. With that singular ignorance of what had transpired during the time he was in a state of intoxication, he inquired very particularly “why he wasn’t allowed to go out?” upon which he was informed by the surly constable, whose acquaintance we have made before, “that they wasn’t in the habit there of letting thieves loose;” a remark which excited the classical and mathematical Theophilus to such an extent, that he invited the base insinuator “to come on.” Being quieted, however, by a blow in the chest, that sent him on his back upon the bench, Rhomboid proceeded to ask, “Who it was that dared to accuse him?”

“You’ll see in a minute or two,” replied the constable. “I’ve sent for the gentleman, and he’ll be here directly.”

It was remarkable what an exceedingly vague impression Rhomboid had as to his own proceedings during the past few days; he had some recollection of breaking a cupboard open, and taking a lot of money and notes out of it, but where it was, or to whom it belonged, he had not the least idea. In fact, he had poured so much strong liquid down his throat in the course of the last fortnight, that he was in a terribly shattered and enfeebled state, and trembled as one with the ague. A more pitiable and contemptible spectacle it was impossible to contemplate, as he sat crooning and swearing like a man out of his mind. But the creaking of the door that led in from the office startled him to his feet, and he stood face to face with George Brown-

low, behind whom stood the constable as imperturbable as ever. But a single glance, and the whole aspect of Rhomboid's countenance changed.

"Oh, so it's you that have locked me up, is it?" he hissed between his teeth; "you who've brought this disgrace upon me. All right, my friend, I'll be even with you; only just wait awhile."

"Come, Rhomboid," entreated Brownlow, "don't put yourself out, it's all a mistake, and I'll soon set it all right."

"It isn't a mistake," answered Rhomboid; "I'm charged with breaking open your cupboard and stealing money and bank notes out of it, and it's all right, and the truth, for I did do it."

All this time the imperturbable constable was writing busily in a little book he had taken from his pocket.

"What would you do, man?" whispered Brownlow, "you are convicting yourself."

"Convicting myself, am I?" was the reply; "so much the better; but hark you, George Brownlow—and you listen to this, too, Mr. Policeman. This gentleman here as you call him, shall go with me, as sure as my name is what it is. I like the company of old friends, and he and I have known one another too long to wish to be separated."

"Constable," said Brownlow to the imperturbable one, drawing him aside, "can't I withdraw the charge? I had much rather not prosecute."

"Withdraw the charge! well, I'm blessed, that is impudence," was the comforting reply; "when in my

presence the prisoner has admitted his guilt. It ain't likely, now, is it, that I'm going to help you at compounding a felony? Not if I knows it!" And with that the imperturbable one put his finger at the side of his nose, and winked violently.

Yes, George Brownlow, well may you feel sick at your heart; the game is nearly up, and your race of iniquity run!





CHAPTER XXIII.

INTO THE RIGHT HANDS !

GOOD-BYE, dear old Herringbourne," exclaimed Janet, as, at imminent risk to her neck, she leaned out of the railway carriage window, and waved her hand in the direction of the quiet, fishing village in which so much that is important to this history has been enacted.

They had made a start at last, and were speeding homeward, behind the steam horse, to give Aunt Sally and Sam two surprises that neither of them in the least anticipated. When I say they, I mean of course Uncle Oliver, Janet and Master Oliver, not, however, forgetting Warner and Mrs. Mortimer, who accompanied them, being likewise bound for the great city upon urgent and important business best known to them alone. The journey was a long one, but like most other things, it came to an end at last, with the remarkable exception in its favour that all parties were just as good friends when they arrived as when they started, which

experienced hands in these matters will admit is saying a very great deal !

The arrival at the terminus in London was a signal for the separation of the forces, Mrs. Mortimer going to sleep at a friend's house, Warner taking up his quarters at the nearest tavern, till the morrow, and Uncle Oliver, Janet, and our hero, making the best of their way in a cab to Sam's cottage. It had been arranged, however, that they should all meet there the following evening, Uncle Oliver boldly asserting, with what good reason my children well know, "that his brother Sam would be right glad to see them all, and would give them a hearty welcome," which invitation Mrs. Mortimer and Warner both readily accepted, not a little influenced by Janet's entreaty to them to come.

Leaving Mrs. Mortimer and Warner for the present, we must follow the trio to Sam's in the cab. Have you ever known, my children, what it is to be in a position to give a pleasant surprise to some one you love and respect, whether it be in the shape of a present of something they have expressed a wish for, or the restoration of a cherished object that they have believed to be lost beyond hope of recovery? If you have, you will comprehend Janet's and Uncle Oliver's impatience on the present occasion. As for the old sailor, he was in a fearful state of excitement, and could hardly sit still in his anxiety to arrive at his destination. For I should have stated before that neither Aunt Sally nor Sam knew of Janet's having obtained the use of her eyes; lest any mischance should occur in the interval, Uncle Oliver

thought it best not to excite expectations that possibly might never be realised, and so had avoided all mention of the subject in his letters to the cottage. But she could see perfectly now ; and the little Doctor at Herringbourne declared that there was not the least cause to fear a relapse. It was quite dark when they arrived at the gate of the small piece of garden that led up to the cottage ; but Aunt Sally's sharp ears had caught the sound of the cab's wheels, and she was standing there ready to open the door and embrace her darling Janet.

I have made a dozen attempts to describe the scene that followed, when, having folded her niece in her arms, Aunt Sally was startled out of all propriety by a great, big boy springing into them, and hugging her with an energy that took all the breath out of her ; but, having wasted several quires of paper in the attempt, find that I cannot do justice to it, and so leave it to the imagination of my readers, merely remarking that Janet's altered condition was as yet unnoticed by Aunt Sally, as well as by Sam, who followed his sister down the path and joined in the general hugging and kissing that was going on. Mutual greetings being over, all parties made their way into the cottage, where a cozy supper was awaiting the travellers, who were welcomed in the noisiest fashion by Mr. Dash, who since we last saw him had grown so old that he had considerable difficulty in getting about, and consequently preferred to curl himself up in the corner by the fire-place and sleep. Flinging off her hat and brushing back her hair from her forehead,

Janet rushed up to her father, and taking hold of both his hands with hers, looked up into his face. "Father, darling," she exclaimed, great tears starting into those eyes once so dead and senseless, but now endued with life and animation, "look at me, I can see you now as well as you can me! I am no longer blind, my own darling father!"

For a moment there was an expression of doubt and hesitation on Sam's countenance, but in one earnest glance he comprehended the great blessing that had been conferred on his dear one, and with a sob of intense joy, he caught her to his bosom, and held her there, while his lips shaped themselves to a prayer of thanksgiving to Him whose blessed Son made the blind to see. As for Aunt Sally, her feelings got a great deal too much the better of her, and there were strong indications of her going off in a fit of hysterics. But, with that strong-mindedness to which attention has before been directed, she controlled herself with a violent effort, and proceeded to put back into the pot the tea which in her emotion she had poured into the slop basin. For the rest of that evening's proceedings, I drop the curtain: it is needless to say how happily it was spent, or how Oliver, with his boyish vigour and impulsiveness of language, related all that happened to him since the day when he so mysteriously disappeared. Sam Hill was not of a revengeful turn, but ere he went to sleep that night he registered a vow that he would search out Rhomboid and the cowardly hound Brownlow, and hand them over to that punishment they so richly deserved.



"Janet rushed up to her father, and taking his hand in hers, and looking up into his face, said, 'I am no longer blind.'"

All the next afternoon Aunt Sally was in a state of the greatest excitement, making preparations for the guests Uncle Oliver had invited, one of whom required no further recommendation to her regard than that he had been instrumental in saving Oliver's life. Never was there such a woman for manufacturing tasty compounds out of cold meat and odds-and-ends, and to-day she was manœuvring among the pots and pans in a fashion that told she was attempting something more wonderful than usual. In fact, the entertainment in contemplation for Mrs. Mortimer and Warner promised to be of a sumptuous and aldermanic character, as Uncle Oliver himself had been ordering all sorts of delicacies at the nearest pastry-cook's, to say nothing of "real natives" and lobsters at the fishmonger's; while Sam might have been observed surreptitiously conveying into the house a small hamper, which, when he came to open it, contained a variety of bottles, that certainly were not *empty*. The appointed hour was five o'clock, and sure enough as the nearest clock was striking, Warner's tall figure appeared at the gate, to be welcomed in boisterous fashion by Oliver, who rushed out helter skelter to admit him. There was no formality in introduction at the cottage, but both Sam and Aunt Sally, who came forward wiping her fingers on her apron, gave Warner's hand an earnest, kindly squeeze that satisfied him, far better than words could, how pleased they both were to see him under their roof. Mrs. Mortimer was only a few minutes behind time, and she in her turn was made thoroughly

at home at once. Before the quarter chimed the party were seated at the table doing full justice to the good things before them, and chattering away one to another, as if they were the oldest friends in the world. My pen again refuses to describe the amount of hot muffins, new-laid eggs, and Dundee marmalade that was consumed on this eventful evening; considering that Aunt Sally had advertised her intention of putting supper on the table at half-past nine o'clock, tea received quite as much attention as it might reasonably have expected. The business of eating having been brought to a conclusion for a while, room was made for Aunt Sally to clear cups and saucers away, after which chairs were drawn into a circle round the fire, for the night was damp and cold, and a deal of pleasant talk ensued. By-and-by Aunt Sally, released from her task of washing up, took her place among the rest, and excited more than one hearty laugh by her quaint and original sayings.

"Well, Warner," said Uncle Oliver, during a pause, placing his hand on Warner's shoulder, who was sitting next to him. "Have you made up your mind what you're going to do? Do you intend to have another turn at the sea?"

"I don't feel a very strong inclination in that direction," was the answer. "If I am to be guided by first impressions, I should say decidedly not."

"Depend on it you're right, Warner," put in Sam; "beside that I'm going to ask you to lend me a hand in punishing that scoundrel who kidnapped our lad away from us."

There was no light in the room, else they all would have seen a sad look upon Warner's face as he replied, "Mr. Hill, I would do anything in the world for Oliver's sake, but I can never return to Barnslade—it awakens too many sad thoughts, too many bitter reflections."

"I'm sure," chimed in Oliver, "when once you were there you'd be glad, because Mona wants you back again so much."

Hereat—by way of parenthesis—let us observe that Janet tossed her head and pouted indignantly. Mona again, indeed!

"I would undergo any sacrifice to punish George Brownlow, but I fear it is impossible."

"Well, all I know is," said Sam, "that I'm off to Barnslade the first thing to-morrow morning to see the gentleman; and if I don't hand him over to the police my name is not Sam Hill!"

"Bravo, Sam," observed Uncle Oliver, clapping his hands, "that's right my boy, let the scoundrel have it; by Jove, I'll tell you what," he continued, "I'm blest if we don't all go. Eh, Mrs. Mortimer, what do you say to a trip into the country?"

As with Warner, so with her, there being no light in the room, save that of the fire, prevented them seeing the expression of pain that had fixed itself on Mrs. Mortimer's countenance since Brownlow's name had been mentioned, for it awoke within her thoughts and longings that which had best have remained at rest.

"Thank you," she replied, her voice slightly quivering,

"I have something that requires my presence in London ; besides, I am such a bad traveller."

"Well, Sally, what do you say," inquired Uncle Oliver, "you won't refuse to make one of the party."

"Yes, I shall," was the answer ; "what on earth do we want to go tomfooling a lot of money away in travelling, when there ain't a mite of necessity for it. It's all right enough for Sam and you too, if you like, to set to work to punish the rascal ; but women's no business mixing themselves up in such things. So I shall stay at home and keep house along with Janet ; and if Mrs. Mortimer don't mind a shake down, and likes to come and put up here while you're away, I shall be heartily glad to see her."

"A capital idea, Sal," remarked Sam, "and I hope Mrs. Mortimer will allow me to join in the invitation, and won't say no to it."

I may add that Mrs. Mortimer didn't say no, and that it was arranged that Sam, Oliver, and Uncle Oliver should make for Barnslade the next day ; though, as it afterwards turned out, both Aunt Sally and Mrs. Mortimer did accompany them.

By-and-by, the elaborately-prepared supper came, and having regard to the quantity of buttered muffins that disappeared in the early part of the evening, it was marvellous how lobsters, and oysters, and other tempting edibles were disposed of by the assembled party. It may not be invidious to remark that Uncle Oliver did his duty like a man, and if he only dreamt as he ate, he must have spent a lively night of it when he got to bed.

Supper being over, the circle round the fire was restored with the addition of pipes and certain glasses of a steaming compound, that Aunt Sally had manufactured, which smelt suspiciously like punch, and the excellent qualities of which when made I am bound to say she appeared thoroughly to appreciate.

"If it would not be asking too much of you, Mr. Hill," remarked Warner, "I should esteem it a favour if you would tell me something of Oliver's early history. You know what an interest I take in him, and always have, and——"

"You needn't make any apologies," answered Sam, heartily. "All I know of him you shall hear with pleasure," and then, settling himself more comfortably in his chair, he continued, "Of course you are aware in the first place he is not my own child, I only adopted him."

"I guessed something of the sort, from what my friend the Captain here told me," responded Warner.

With that Sam continued his story.

When he came to mention the scrap of paper that had been found sewn up in the lining of Oliver's little frock, Aunt Sally, who had been fiddling about at the lock of a small box which she had taken off the mantel-piece, at last lifted up the lid and handed the document to Sam.

"You might have thought," he said, pausing in the history, "that this would have given us some clue as to where Oliver's relations might be found, but all the search and inquiries I instituted proved fruitless, and at last I gave up the task in despair. Just look at the paper," Sam continued, passing it to Warner; "if Arthur

Mordaunt is alive, what would he not give to hold it in his hand."

"Arthur Mordaunt, what do you mean?" gasped Warner, dashing open the folded document he held between his fingers, and literally devouring it with all his eyes. Then, when he came to the end of it, his hands dropped on his knees, a look passed over his face that it is impossible to describe, and he murmured, "Thank God!"

And the rest looked on wonderingly!

"Oliver, my boy, come here," said Warner, tears standing in his eyes, "what do you think that this little piece of paper proves; perhaps you can't guess, and so I will tell you. It proves first my innocence of a crime for which I suffered in another's place, and, secondly, that I am your father. Mr. Hill, I am the Arthur Mordaunt mentioned in that paper, and she, in whose presence it was written by the man who so cruelly wronged me, was my brave, true-hearted wife, who, when she saw me after my conviction, swore that she would search George Blundell out, though she had to go to the end of the world to find him. And now I know how truly she has kept her word. Oh, Alice, my darling, you often said you would lay down your life for me!" Sobs choked his utterance further, and, resting his head on his new-found son's shoulder, Warner's whole frame shook with emotion.

In the land of shadows there is a tender, loving woman's spirit that sees her dear ones thus united and blesses them. Could any sacrifice have been too great

to restore them thus to happiness and one another at last?

I will not pause over the details of what transpired during the rest of the evening in Sam's parlour, save and except to mention that when Warner had recovered from his emotion, Mrs. Mortimer went up to him, and taking his hand in her's, said softly, "Dear Arthur, thank God, George did right by you at last. Wickedly, cruelly I kept his secret, and would have kept it to the end, though he left me and my baby to starve; but he has avowed himself now, and lifted the seal from my lips. God bless you and give you all the happiness you deserve."

At last the clouds have lifted after years of storm and tempest, and the sun mounts grandly, lighting up their silver lining so long hidden from view. To-morrow shall see William Warner called by that name no longer, but restored to good fame and reputation, for the public shall know how ill-used he has been. Nor should I wonder if the newspapers, commenting upon his case, should say how much better that a dozen guilty men should escape than that one such as this should innocently suffer.





CHAPTER XXIV.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE !

MR. GROWLER, chief magistrate of Barnslade, was in anything but a good humour ; although he sat in the Police Court every morning at ten o'clock precisely, and disposed of all the evil doers who came before him in a summary and business-like fashion, he somehow or other did not manage to strike terror into the breasts of the criminal class in that town. On this particular morning he is knitting his brows and clenching his lips over the long list of charges that has been handed to him by the Police Inspector, at whose side stands the imperturbable constable before mentioned in connection with Rhomboid's arrest. "Humph," said Mr. Growler, with a savage cough, "the people in this town get worse and worse. What's this charge of stealing bank notes? It seems a serious one. Do you know anything about it, Inspector?" "I do, sir," replied the imperturbable one. I'm the principal witness in the case, or at least am likely to be, for the prosecutor isn't to be relied upon."

"Oh, something of that sort, is there," answered Mr. Growler; "I'm glad I know it, because I shall be able to deal with him in a way he little expects."

And then the worthy magistrate rubbed his hands gleefully in anticipation of how he should make this same prosecutor look exceedingly small if he attempted to humbug the bench. Up to twelve o'clock Mr. Growler's time was occupied in disposing of a number of trifling charges; in fact it was five minutes past that hour when the name of Theophilus Rhomboid was called, and that worthy, marshalled in by two policemen, made his appearance in the dock. His manner was singularly quiet and reserved, and he bowed respectfully to the magistrate, who asked him whether he was the person mentioned. The first witness called was the imperturbable one, who deposed to having found the prisoner in a state of intoxication literally flinging sovereigns into the gutter. His peculiar conduct had attracted his (the constable's) suspicions, and upon taking him into custody a number of bank-notes, about which information had been previously given at the station, were found upon him. In addition to that, in his (the constable's) presence, the prisoner had admitted that he had stolen them from the prosecutor. The next witness called was George Brownlow, the owner of the money and notes alleged to have been stolen. He stepped into the witness-box with obvious reluctance, and before he was sworn, made an observation to the effect that he was sure the whole matter arose out of a mistake, as the prisoner was an old friend of his, and it was quite

impossible that he could ever have thought of robbing him. Mr. Growler said "that they weren't sitting there to hear people's opinions, but to listen to evidence; and he would therefore thank Mr. Brownlow to take the book in his hand and be sworn."

At this stage of the proceedings, a considerable commotion was caused by the appearance of some half dozen well-dressed people in the body of the court. At the sight of them Brownlow's face turned ghastly pale, for he knew that the retribution, which had followed so slowly upon all his evil doings, was nigh at hand, and that not one of those new comers would spare him a jot of all he so richly deserved. Rhomboid, however, had neither turned his head nor noticed their entrance; leaning over the front of the dock, he listened patiently as Mr. Growler put his questions to Brownlow and received replies. At the conclusion of this interrogation, Mr. Growler inquired whether the prisoner had any questions to put to the witness, to which Rhomboid replied "that he had not." Upon this, Mr. Growler observed that the case was of too serious a nature for him to deal with, and that he must therefore commit the accused to take his trial at the ensuing assizes. If, however, the prisoner had anything to say in his defence, he would listen to it, though whatever he did say would be taken down and used in evidence against him on a future occasion.

"I have something to say, sir," said Rhomboid in answer, "But I promise you it shall be very short. I want to know, and all the world into the bargain, what

sort of man my accuser is. He has been working for many years at Mr. Lloyd's factory, and his master has looked upon him as an honest, respectable, and trustworthy man ; but I, who have known him for what he really was worth, say that he was an hypocrite and a villain. His practice for years has been to decoy and kidnap young boys, and to bring them down here, making them work at the factory, and thus earning large sums of money."

"It's all false, your worship," interrupted Brownlow ; "it's very hard that a respectable man should have his character ruined in this way. It's time that such things were put a stop to."

"Yes, George Brownlow, you are right," said one of the strangers who had entered the court as before described, and who was no other than Arthur Mordaunt, once William Warner, stepping up to the side of the witness-box, "it is time that such things were put a stop to ; and I have come here to tell the magistrate all I know about you. If your worship will forgive me," he continued, turning respectfully to Mr. Growler, whose interest was excited, and who motioned him to proceed, "I think it right to give you some information with respect to this person."

"Beware," whispered Brownlow under his breath, "you had best be careful, I will reveal everything."

Warner paid not the slightest attention to him, but continued. "What that man at the bar there has said is perfectly true ; he and this man together kidnapped a young lad named Oliver Mordaunt, and he was brought

'ere and set to work at Mr. Lloyd's factory ; the boy is here, and will answer for himself."

"This man," interrupted Brownlow, furiously, "is nothing better than a common thief; ask him if he hasn't had eighteen months' imprisonment with hard labour ; and he can't deny it."

"Thanks to you and your fellow-thief, I cannot deny that ; but certain documents have come into my possession that have been handed to the proper authorities, and instructions are on their way hither for you to be taken into custody upon the charge of aiding and abetting one George Blundell in stealing a cash-box from Messrs. Robson's office, for which offence I was tried and suffered the imprisonment you mentioned."

Quite contrary to all precedent, Mr. Growler never uttered a word or interfered in any way.

"Am I to have no protection ?" inquired Brownlow, plaintively ; "are these statements to be made against me without any witness being called to support them ?"

Again, another of the strangers came forward from the body of the court and stood by the witness box, in the person of a tall woman dressed in black, with a thick veil over her face. "I am here, George Brownlow," she said, lifting her veil and disclosing the features of George Blundell's wife, she whom we have known as Mrs. Mortimer, "and will substantiate every word that has been uttered when the time arrives for me to do so." Meanwhile the imperturbable one had been closely examining the Bank of England notes that had been found upon Rhomboid, and, selecting one from

amongst them, bearing the number 00035, he stepped up to Mr. Growler's desk, and handing it to him, muttered something audible to the worthy magistrate alone. "You are quite sure," he said, in the most off hand manner to Brownlow, "that the numbers of the various notes given by you to the police were correct?"

"Yes, sir! that is, I——" and there he paused.

"Inspector," said Mr. Growler, adjourn this case for an hour, and during the interval you make inquiry of these persons with respect to the matter, and be sure and not let this witness be lost sight of."

"By what right, sir," exclaimed Brownlow, his face grown almost green with the faintness of fear that was upon him, "am I to be treated in this way? It's shameful that a respectable man should be publicly disgraced by a parcel of lying, thieving scoundrels, who want to do him an injury because he had a hand in their being punished. As to kidnapping boys, I should have been ashamed to think of such a thing. Why, this youngster they've spoken about wasn't called Oliver at all, his name was Jemmy, and he was the son of this woman, who wanted to get rid of him, and so left him in my charge." This with an evil glance at Mrs. Blundell.

A tall, raggedly-dressed urchin, in the person of Jerry, sprang up from a seat in the corner of the court, and called out—

"That's a big lie, guv'nor, and you know it. You licked and knocked poor Jemmy about till he died, and

then because you saw that Oliver was like him in face, you tried to make dead Mike and me call him Jemmy. But it wouldn't wash, guv'nor ; we know'd you were up to one of your games, and I'm bothered if we weren't right."

At this stage of the proceedings Mr. Growler arrived at the conclusion that a court of justice was hardly the place for a continuation of the scene which was being enacted ; and ordering Brownlow, who attempted to speak, to hold his tongue, adjourned for his lunch, repeating to the inspector the instructions before given to investigate the statement made by the man Mordaunt, and also make some inquiries as to how the name Robson and Co. had come upon the back of one of the bank notes found in Rhomboid's possession, and alleged to have been stolen from Brownlow.

A more striking situation than that presented in the Barnslade police court could scarcely be conceived. With a cool, calm smile of triumph on his face Rhomboid had listened to all that had transpired, and as he walked out into the waiting-room in charge of the imperturbable one, and passed close by Brownlow's elbow, he hissed into his ear, " You're done, my boy, your game's up. If I'm sent to Portland, I shall at least have the pleasure of your company." Brownlow lifted his clenched fist to strike his tormentor, but, with a grip on the elbow that made him wince, the inspector quieted him. In a minute more the door of the waiting-room, and of this history, closes on the mathematical and classical Theophilus Rhomboid, with this addition, that

his anticipations of Portland were fully realised, for he resided for some time in that healthy and improving locality at the expense of a beneficent and grateful country.

* * * * *

But little remains to be told, though over these last words the story-teller lingers, reluctant to write them, for he knows that when they are set down, the companionship that has been so dear and pleasant to him will be at an end, and his connection with all those who have figured in the past pages dissolved. To merge the third person into the first and become egotistical, I feel far from overjoyed, although my task is ended, or soon will be in a few brief sentences, and am loth to set down my puppets and bid them farewell. But it must be so, or else I could go on writing of Oliver and those who circled round him until Doomsday.

I close my eyes, and a vision of them passes before me. I see my boy-hero grown to man's estate, wise and honourable in his generation, the pride of a doating father's declining years, and the idol of a loving and devoted wife. I hear him call her Janet, and watch her gazing upward into his face with bright speaking eyes, full of life and affection. And then there floats up the form of a little fussy, busy doctor, than whom no more welcome guest ever takes his seat at their hospitable board. I see that boy-hero's doating father, his hair grown grey and his face wrinkled, Mr. Lloyd's successor in the Barnslade factory, rich, generous, and honoured as his predecessor, and loved by his workpeople, to

whom he is the friend rather than the master. I see that another name has been placed upon the tombstone that marked the spot in Barnslade churchyard where Mrs. Lloyd lay, and I see that its letters spell "Jonas Lloyd," who has gone to rest beside her he loved so dearly. I see a tall handsome girl leaning upon her husband's arm, stooping to gather a tiny violet that peeps out from the green blades of grass that wave over their grave, and I know that it is the Mona of my story, wedded to the man she loves, and who cherishes her as dearly. I see brave Sam Hill and Uncle Oliver in a beautiful little home on the outskirts of Barnslade, cheering and cherishing one another in their declining days, and highly popular and respected in the town, for whether it be to support charities, or cricket matches, or regattas, the pursestrings at Rose Villa are always open. But I see not Aunt Sally, the brave true woman with a heart of gold, as honest as she was fearless of purpose; a terrible mist gathers before me, and I know that the untiring faithful spirit has taken its flight to a land of peace and repose. Yet there remains a small arm-chair and a knitting-basket, which always may be seen in the drawing-room at Rose Cottage, that no one ever touches or uses, only they stand there as relics of the sister the two dwellers in that house hope some day to rejoin. I see not George Blundell's wife, she too has gone the way of all flesh; indeed she never thoroughly recovered from the shock of the discovery that her darling boy was dead. But honest, fearless Jerry I do see, still working at the factory, now grown a steady, in-

dustrious man, and one in whom his master reposes the greatest confidence.

But one remains ! And him I see in a convict's dress, with bent back and sunken eyes, struggling on through years of penal servitude, more brutal and revengeful in disposition than ever, and only looking forward to the time when his term of punishment shall expire to execute his vengeance on those who caused him to be sent here. But that will never be ; George Brownlow, otherwise Number 55, for the scene changes, and I see a silent prison warder taking out the card upon a cell door with that number upon it and inserting another in its place bearing the word "Dead." From the summit of the giant cliffs that overhang the sea down to the rocks on which the waves dash ceaselessly, he flung himself, so 'twas told afterwards !

The visions fade away, the grey dawn is breaking in through the chinks of the shutters, and the pen falls from my fingers. My task is done !





“BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER.”

FHOSE who watched the signs of the times knew that the breaking of the storm could not be much delayed. From all parts of France went out to Paris and Parliament, sitting in permanent session, cries of complaint and discontent—hoarse grumblings of the spendthrift and indolent monarchy, angry denunciation and protest against new taxes and imposts.

The while Louis in his cabinet muddles his time away tinkering in imaginary business at lock-making, and Marie, the most beautiful woman in Europe, amid her ladies, discourses of costumes and *coiffures*, an earthquake is preparing beneath their feet, whose coming and effects shall hereafter be read of in history with wonder, horror, and dismay. Hunger is stalking about in country parts equally as in the cities; men with empty stomachs meet first in holes and corners, and out-of-the-way places, and then growing bolder and hungrier, or more desperate,

openly defy the police and military, as they gather together and talk of their burdens and wrongs, and the oppression of kings and ministers. As day succeeds day, the voice of the people waxes stronger and stronger, till presently a growl echoed from it penetrates to Louis in his workshop, and for a moment startles him. Only for a moment! he does not realize that throughout his kingdom the hard workers in field and city are beginning to think of other tools, round which to grasp their fingers, than the spade or trowel; talking one with another of a regeneration of all things, of liberty, brotherhood, equality for all, of the people governing itself,—of a new earth, in short, to be shaped and moulded as they would dig a trench and build a house. Yet, perchance, had a vision risen before these same feverish enthusiasts of famous “September days” to come, with Paris gutters running with blood, of tottering old men and fair-faced women dragged from their prisons, and thrust into the midst of crowds of patriots, who, maddened with murder and drink, slash, batter, and butcher, right and left, till their cheeks and hands are crimson with the blood of their victims, they might have paused ere they let loose the demon “Revolution” on his wild career. But the prescience was not given them. The clouds slowly gathering upon the horizon but dimly foreshadowed the destroying whirlwind that Providence had willed should sweep over France.

The time—near Christmas, 1788—a period of trouble and doubt, of gloomy foreboding to the observant and thoughtful. About two miles from Arras, the famous old city of the Pays d’Artois, on the high road to Paris, stood the

Château Launay, inhabited by the Count of that name, a brave gentleman, once the gayest of the gay in the *salons* of the Tuilleries and the galleries of Versailles, who had now abandoned Courts and Courtiers for the peace and happiness of his country home, preferring to devote his remaining years to the society of his beautiful and accomplished wife, and his two children, Lucille, the eldest, a handsome girl of twelve, and Louis, her brother, some two years her junior. Beloved by his tenantry, to whom he was as much a friend as a master, and adored in his family circle, the Count might well flatter himself with the satisfaction of feeling that he was on good terms with all men, and that he had done his best, in the position of life to which Providence had called him, to conduce to the happiness and content of his fellow-creatures.

There was only one person among those he employed who ever gave him a moment's uneasiness, and that was his head gardener, Pierre Morel, who lived in the lodge at the park gates. And, truth to tell, this same Pierre was a strange and incomprehensible being. Upon him favours had been bestowed with a lavish hand, his wages were liberal, his work easy.

When he married Marguerite, the Countess's confidential maid, the lodge had been most generously furnished and fitted up for him, and his pay was considerably increased, while his son Bertrand had been named after the Count, who himself stood sponsor, and made him a handsome godfather's gift in the shape of a deposit in his name of 500 francs in the bank at Arras. But none of these things seemed to soften or in the slightest degree

impress Pierre Morel's morose and sullen nature. He was a man discontented by temperament and disposition, resolutely determined to be satisfied with nothing and nobody, with an inherent hatred for his fellow-creatures, and particularly for those who occupied a better position in life than himself. Latterly he had spent most of his leisure time either in reading the wretched, ill-printed, worse written, trashy pamphlets that the apostles of revolution were surreptitiously distributing through France, or frequenting seditious meetings in lowest cafés and cabarets of Arras, where desperate schemes or desperate deeds were talked of as yet in whispers. Bitter work, indeed, was it for poor Marguerite, as she sat alone at night waiting his return from these nocturnal gatherings, which latterly had been held at a cabaret outside the town, in order to avoid the observation of the police, who had grown too inquisitive within the city walls. She had long since learned to estimate Pierre at his proper value, and many a bitter regret passed through her mind that she had ever quitted her good and comfortable place with the Countess to become his wife. Her sole joy and happiness was in her boy Bertrand, a bright laughing lad, born the same year as Mademoiselle Lucille, and already grown into a fine manly fellow, full of noble instincts and brave qualities. It was at least a consolation for her to know that her affection for him was reciprocated to the full, and that in his eyes there was no being in the world like his mother. In his own peculiar fashion, Pierre had endeavoured to show the feelings of a parent towards Bertrand; but the lad always had before him terrible scenes he had

witnessed in the lodge parlour, when something more than harsh words had been used, and he could never get out of his head sobs and moans he had heard as he lay in his bed, that told him how sorry was the burden she he loved so dearly had to bear. Do what he would, he always regarded his father with a dread which made him shudder whenever Pierre appeared, and as far as he could he kept himself out of his way.

Of course Bertrand was a great favourite up at the Château, and in all the amusements in which Lucille and Louis indulged—he was their playfellow and inseparable companion—a kind of pet dog who was only too delighted to fetch and carry for his young master and mistress, and to do whatever they might ask of him. Once when Lucille had been chased by an angry swan from the lake at one corner of the grounds, Bertrand had rushed to the rescue, and flinging himself in the way of the infuriated bird, had been sorely bitten and bruised; a piece of heroism that had made a deep impression upon the heart of Mademoiselle, and gained him an even warmer place in the regard of the Count and Countess, who treated him thenceforth as one of their own children. Pierre, on the contrary, when he heard of it, roundly rated Bertrand, for, as he was pleased to put it, "risking his own skin to save the child of an accursed aristocrat."

It was the second week in December, a dark pitiless night, with the snow falling heavily, and covering everything in its white pall. A cutting wind from the east swept over the fields and along the highways, driving the storm before it, and making those who were indoors, as they heard it

shrieking and whistling in its wild career, thankful that they had nothing to call them abroad. In the warm closely-curtained *salon* of the château the Countess sat, her eyes ever and anon turning eagerly towards the timepiece on the mantelshelf, as the hand progressed towards the hour when the Count had promised to reach home. Important business had called him away late in the afternoon to Arras, and he had ridden thither, promising to return by the ordinary supper-time. In the lodge parlour, Marguerite also was watching and waiting for her husband's coming; the table ready laid for his meal, and some warm soup in the saucepan on the hob; for Pierre had now got quite in the habit of being absent during the evening, and the hour of his return became more uncertain and irregular.

Poor Countess! poor Marguerite! as you sit by your firesides watching the blazing, crackling wood, and the bright sparks darting up the chimneys, how little do either of you guess what this night was to bring forth for both of you! Even now sad work is being done, and when to-morrow morning dawns you will almost curse the daylight, and wish that you had never lived to see it again.

The cabaret of the “Chapeau Noir,” which was situated a mile nearer to Arras than the château on the high road, was by no means an engaging or savoury establishment. It was difficult to say which was the dirtier, the house itself, or its begrimed ill-looking proprietor, Jacques Polot, whose countenance was enough to hang him any day without a trial, and whose antecedents could not

have undergone any very close investigation without the discovery of circumstances decidedly not to his advantage. Probably for this reason his establishment had been chosen by Pierre Morel and his brother conspirators, when the old rendezvous in Arras had become too hot, and they soon found they had no excuse to fear any danger from Jacques, who did not take long to discover that patriotism was thirsty work, and that their meeting always necessitated a good deal of drink.

Consequently, the large room on the first floor had been devoted to their special accommodation, and there it is we find ourselves on the night when the Countess and Marguerite are waiting and watching, and just about the hour when the Count, having concluded his business in Arras, has ordered his horse to be saddled and brought out.

It was not a very pleasant company to look at, these same ten to a dozen patriots boozing within the walls of "Chapeau Noir," planning schemes for the regeneration of their country and the glorification of themselves, through a mist of poisonous tobacco and vitriol-like brandy. Already more than one of them, overcome by his libations, was asleep, with head resting on the table, impervious to the eloquence of a gaunt delegate from a kindred society in Paris, who was grinding out the articles of the new political creed, that henceforth all men must believe or be exterminated.

"Messieurs," he concluded, waving his hands over his head, significantly touching with one of them the butt of a pistol that showed itself from the breast of his coat,

"the hour is drawing near when these villains of aristocrats, these thrivers on the toil and sweat of the people, these cattle that eat while we starve and drink when we are parched, shall be trampled down beneath the feet of the people. Then shall the oppression and wrongs of centuries be wiped out in blood; and every citizen shall fail in his duty who counts not the life of at least one of the carrion as his share in the Holy Crusade of Extermination. Even as I speak, the great heart of Paris is throbbing for vengeance. Shall I then bear back thither a message hence of sympathy? Shall I tell them there that the same will, the same spirit is among you, and that you are prepared for deeds, not words?"

As the orator abruptly closed his discourse with this question, he was met by a responsive chorus of "Yes, we are!" from such of the patriots as had been able to resist the somniferous influences of Jacques Polot's brandy. Only one of them sprang to his feet—a rough bull-headed fellow in a blouse, upon whom the fiery spirits of which he had partaken, instead of provoking sleepiness, seemed rather to have created in him a state of semi-insanity. His eye glittered with a strange wildness, as, brandishing a long knife in his hand, he almost screamed out, "Vengeance! vengeance! and at once!" a cry that was taken up and repeated round the table, all standing. A grim smile passed over the face of the delegate from Paris, as he murmured, "'Tis well!"

Two silent, motionless men, shrouded in long military cloaks reaching to their heels, watched unseen the door of the "Chapeau Noir" that night as the patriots came

out. When the last of them had stepped forth, and Jacques Polot had closed and barred the entrance for the night, these two turned their steps towards Arras.

"Do you know them all?" inquired one of the other.

"Yes, all," was the response.

At that moment, through the beating snow and pitiless night, came the cry as of some one in distress, a cry that sounded strangely like the death-shriek of a suddenly stricken man, and then all was silent save the rushing of the wind.

The timepiece on the mantelpiece in the *salon* of the château chimed eleven, and still the Count came not. Already he was late by an hour, and the Countess each moment grew more anxious and nervous. Ever and anon she went to the window, and drew aside the curtain to peer eagerly out, and try to catch the sound of his horse's hoofs; but her ear met with no response, and the falling sheets of snow only redoubled the sickening fears that slowly, but surely, seemed to grow upon her. What could have happened? The clock chimed half-past eleven as once again she rose from her chair and crossed to the window. Why did she raise her hands to her head, and press her hair back from her forehead? Why did her eyes gaze with wild intensity towards the foot of the steps that led up to the front door? Why with a hopeless shriek did she fall like a dead woman, senseless upon the floor?

At the foot of those same steps stood the Count's good horse, like a snow statue; but he was riderless, and a great splash of blood clotted his mane.

But a few minutes before this, Pierre had come hurriedly into the lodge parlour, his whole frame trembling as if he had seen some spirit.

"Why, Pierre, what on earth is the matter?" exclaimed Marguerite, startled in spite of herself.

"Matter, woman! nothing," was the reply: "get me some water, and quickly; my hands are dirty. Do not stand gaping there, but go," he added. He saw that his wife's eyes were fixed with a wild glare upon his wrist. He looked down in the direction to which that led him. There was a big red smear on his wristband. With an oath, he covered it over with his hand. "Will you get water?" he muttered between his teeth, and then stepped towards her as she stood rooted to the spot, raised his arm, seemingly to strike her: indeed, the blow would have fallen upon her horror-stricken face, but it was stayed by a man, who, entering unperceived, stood at his elbow and took hold of him with a grasp of iron.

"Surely, Pierre Morel," quietly remarked the stranger, "you have done enough violence for to-night. Even now your hands are stained with the blood of one victim; would you add others? It is useless to resist," he went on, as Pierre tried to loosen himself, "we are two to one, and are armed." And at that moment a second man entered the room.

"He was one of them, was he not?"

"Yes, and left in company with the man to whom the knife belongs," was the reply.

Out in the snow by the roadside, about a mile from home, towards which he had been riding, thinking of the

bright face and tender welcome that awaited him, the good Count lay dead, stricken there by the assassin's knife.

The deed had not been done for the sake of robbery, so it was said afterwards, for not a single thing had been touched upon the body of the murdered man; but it was dimly hinted that it was the handiwork of a Revolutionary Society, of which Pierre Morel was proved to be a member. The Count de Launay was the first victim offered up at the altar of the new creed.

The man with the knife evaded arrest, but Pierre Morel was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. In vain he protested his innocence: he had belonged to the conspirators whose head-quarters were at the "Chapeau Noir," he had been last seen with the man whose knife had accomplished the fatal deed, his hands and clothes were wet with blood when he was arrested; what were all his asseverations to these facts?

Thus it was that 1788 ended for the Countess de Launay and Marguerite; the one meeting the new year an untimely aged, broken-down woman, robbed of the stay and light of her existence; the other, hardened by her experience into stone, caring for life only for the sake of her boy. As for Pierre Morel, he lay in gaol waiting his doom, and there passed his Christmas Day.





PART II.

MORE than two years had passed by six months. The storm so long threatening had broken forth with fury little dreamed of, and was sweeping all before it to destruction and desolation. Ever and anon, with a swoop more wild and frenzied than the last, it fell upon its victim, France ; and days dawning with clouds betokening murder and massacre ended in sunsets of blood. It is written of those times that they were a "Reign of Terror," but how poorly does that feeble phrase describe them ! it was a season when men and women felt as if screwed down already in their coffins ; with their shrouds round them they had awakened to gasp and fight and battle for life, now that existence was but a matter of a few brief moments. Each called the other "citizen" with blustering lips but quaking hearts, eagerly reckoning how he should be the first to betray: the spirit of Judas had entered the souls of the people. The hours of darkness coming round as they involved Paris, once so smiling, so beautiful, so gay, shrouded her in dreams of blood and death. Now was France enacting a chapter in her career when of her appositely might be said, "happy is the country that has no history."

In one of the narrow streets of the Faubourg St. Honore there was a quaint-looking old-fashioned house, that standing with dangerous temerity over the footway, as if with a kind of promise that one fine morning its curiously welded mixture of bricks and woodwork would make sudden and unpleasant acquaintance with the heads of passers-by. But as yet it had held together, and being situate in a somewhat unfrequented spot, had not been visited with a domiciliary visit from inquisitive patriots, myrmidons of a self-elected executive.

Had they come, they would not have found the ascent of the rickety, creaking staircase that led to the upper rooms an agreeable task. What once had done duty for a balustrade had either rotted or been broken away, and there were ugly holes in some of the stairs that might even have twisted a Mirabeau's ankle. On the second floor for some time past a woman, evidently broken in health and spirits, had been living with her two children, dragging her life through as best she could. The rooms belonging to her had been made comfortable enough, and it was not difficult to discover from their furniture that the means of their owner might have permitted her to reside in some very much more fashionable quarter of the capital. It was a dreary June night, with a drizzling rain falling that damped even patriotism itself, and filled cafés and drinking saloons with customers anxious to stave off rheumatism and influenza from without, and to provoke warmth within. A kind of fetid steam hung in the air, as if the hot and feverish breath of the city were beaten back upon it by an indignant Heaven.

Just now there was much talk over the week's journey. Louis the King, with Madame and the children, had taken himself to the country, without any notice to their loving people, who in their affection and anxiety had sent in haste after them, cutting their journey unexpectedly short, and bringing them Pariswards again, to meet such a boisterous welcome as devoted subjects should accord to their anointed sovereign and his family.

Truly it was a great time; Royalty had been made to comprehend how deep was the interest Patriotism had in it!

The Countess de Launay—for she was the occupier of the rooms before mentioned—was standing silently working by the table at which Lucille and Louis were engaged, the boy putting the finishing-touches to a drawing, the girl, with her head resting upon her hands, lost in the perusal of the open book that lay before her.

The apartment itself was but dimly lighted, owing to the green shade over the lamp, and scarce a sound could be heard in it, save now and then the rustle of the paper leaves, as Lucille turned them over.

The clock from the adjacent church chimed ten, and when the sound of the last stroke had died away, the door opened, and a woman entered. It was none other than Marguerite Morel, who, since that fatal December night, wedding her fate to that of her old mistress, had come with her as her servant to Paris, and had slaved and toiled for her as one seeking to work out a self-imposed penance.

No words of reproach had ever come from the Coun-

tess's lips ; and when it was rumoured and afterwards confirmed that Pierre Morel had escaped from his prison and the death that awaited him, the only words she uttered were, "I hope he may live to be a better man."

Marguerite, though still presenting the same slim and graceful figure as of yore, was greatly aged in feature ; there were deep lines on her face and silver streaks in her hair ; and the eyes, once so bright, were dim and sunken. Scarce had she entered the room where the Countess and her children were sitting, when through the open door might be heard the sound of heavy feet upon the creaking stairs. It was a strange and ominous sign, and Marguerite paused with her fingers upon the handle, while the occupants, startled from that on which they were engaged, turned an anxious and inquiring look towards her.

"They are coming at last," murmured Marguerite under her breath ; "they have been long about it, but they are here now."

"Be it so," said the Countess, quietly rising from her chair, and calmly laying the work upon which she had been engaged on the table, as if she were about to embark upon the most commonplace transaction of ordinary life. "I am ready : nought they can do to me will come amiss. I am prepared for anything—everything !"

There was a rough knock upon the doorpost, and a brusque inquiry of "Who's within ?" Louis sprang to his feet, his whole frame erect and quivering. A rude push thrust Marguerite aside, and a man clad in a nondescript military garb of the Revolution, with a tricoloured

scarf across his shoulders, entered. Crossing to the table, and followed by half-a-dozen creatures as unwashed and unkempt as himself, with his hat on his head, he folded his arms, and spoke as follows :—

"I am here in the name of the people, and seek the wife and children of the defunct aristocrat who called himself Count de Launay. I am commanded to take them hence, so let there be no delay. It is ordered of—" there was a sudden stop to the patriot's eloquence, caused by Louis dashing the hat from his head, exclaiming as he did so,

"In the presence of ladies it is usual to uncover."

The act was foolish, not to say insane. The intruder's companions seized the daring boy, and threatened to deal out summary punishment upon him, while the patriot's face turned ruby red, and his eye flashed ominously.

"Enough," he continued, "the blood of the wolf is in the whelp, it's plain : the brood must be exterminated. Citizen, do your duty."

Down the creaking stairs, out in the slushy street, the strange procession wended its way. At its head marched the patriot-in-chief; behind him, the Countess and her two children, the girl pressing her mother's hand, and gazing into her face, ever and anon, with looks of tenderness and sympathy; the boy, his head and form more upright than ever, as if in defiance of his custodians, and the inquisitive passers-by who stopped, as it went along, to gaze curiously at the captives. But a few paces in the rear followed Marguerite and her son Bertrand, now grown into a broad-shouldered thick-set lad, who, being found in the old house, had been taken summary posses-

sion of—a proceeding he appeared to treat with the utmost indifference. One of the patriots, for security's sake, had sought to hold him by the arm. At which Bertrand turned sharply round, and, brushing his coat where the brave's fingers had touched it, quietly remarked,

"There is no need of that, my friend: I promise you I will not run away. My mother is here—what greater guarantee need you for my remaining?"

Presently they went through the darkness, grim and silent, as if ashamed of the business they had been doing during the hours of daylight. It was, for a change, a quiet night in the city of murder and blood: the shadows of the butchered dead hovered around, and slumbering patriots, tossing feverishly on their beds, only half soothed by their drunken sleep, clutched their thirsty throats parching for moisture, as a dim foreshadowing coming to them of how their end should be like unto that to which they had condemned others. Midnight—twelve strokes as measured as ever stealing across the river: all else had changed but time, which counted its seconds, and minutes, and hours, with the same precision as of yore. But a few paces farther, and the door of the Conciergerie was reached.

Through a jagged tear in the drifting heavens, where sheets of scud were flying in pursuit of each other, the broad face of the moon gazing down cast its soft light upon the strange company, and made even the patriots' dull eyes glisten. Around the head of Marguerite its rays seemed for an instant to gather, bathing her in a silver halo like some martyr of old, the while she stood within its reach, her hand on her boy's shoulder, waiting till the

sleepy doorkeeper should rouse himself from his slumbers, and draw back the bolts of the gloomy portal over which he had kept watch and ward. Only a few moments' delay, and they had passed into the hall of death, wherein were gathered a strange multitude of creatures of all conditions, and parties, and creeds, awaiting the inevitable. The night crept on with no laggard steps, this night which was to be the last for so many of those who, now counting its passage by the beating of their hearts, shuddered as the clock near at hand, in foreboding tones, struck the hours. Some sat in silence, hands clasped in those of their loved ones, like human statues ; others wept; others talked with a feverish pertinacity, as if struggling to leave nothing unsaid, this side of the grave, that they had to say. A few slept, but they were old and worn: the expression on their faces seemed to entreat that the end might come speedily. Ah me ! what a sight those old prison walls had to look down upon ! Surely, had there been a heart in their cold grey stones, they would have fallen inwards, and with one merciful avalanche have swept those tortured souls into a swift and common grave !

The dreary night died out, and the dawn broke strong and clear, casting long streaks of light through the prison hall, but bringing with it only greater misery, deeper despair. In one corner, upon a bench, sat the Countess, Lucille and Louis on either side of her, their heads resting on their mother's lap, the three sleeping as peacefully as they ever had in those happy times at the Château, down in the pleasant Pays d'Artois, now gone never to return.

Had painter with soul or sentiment been there to take note of that group, he would not have wanted theme for his next picture ; yet he must have been a master of his art to have caught the expression of his unconscious sitters. So tranquil and calm were they, that they looked more like marble than flesh and blood.

Suddenly a door opened at the end of the hall, and a man entered. He advanced a few paces, and then in a rough voice exclaimed, "Let the woman De Launay attend before the tribunal !"

Still the Countess and her children slept on. Without a word Marguerite rose from the stool on which she had been sitting, and taking Bertrand by the hand, passed up the hall to where the patriot stood, and slightly inclining her head, quietly said, "I am ready, lead on !"

Roughly seizing her by the arm, he pointed to the still open door, towards which, without a quiver of lip or eye, she stepped obedient to his gesture.

The grasp upon her boy's hand tightened like unto that of a vice as she saw he was about to speak, and then, under her breath, he heard her whisper, "You love them, —for their sakes be ready to suffer everything !"

Along the gloomy passage that led to the room where revolutionary justice was administered, the rough tread of the patriot at their heels, making rude echoes, they walked without exchanging a syllable, except that at each pace Bertrand the more surely gathered within himself the purpose whereon his mother was bent ; and as the realisation of it came the more clearly to him, he drew himself erect, and with all the nobility and courage of his

generous nature strong upon him, braced himself to undergo the ordeal that was in store for them.

Into a small room, with a table at one end, at which sat a dull-eyed beetle-browed man, the rest of it bare of furniture or adornment of any sort, Marguerite and Bertrand were ushered. Two citizen soldiers, gossiping in a corner, suddenly upon their entrance came to attention, if a clumsy shuffle to either side of the table should be so designated. A small creature, dressed in black, gazing out of the open window, turned languidly upon his heel, and cast an inquisitive look at the new-comers, and then resumed his former attitude.

"Who are these, citizen?" inquired the man at the table, leaning forward and resting his chin upon his hands.

"The woman De Launay, and her brat," was the gruff answer.

"Surely I have heard there was a daughter?"

The little man in black at the window again turned on his heel, and interposed in a sharp grating voice, "Yes, I thought there was."

"Bah!" responded the patriot who had conducted Marguerite from the hall, "I saw and know of no daughter. Likely enough some good citizen has taken her into his care long ago."

This seemed to be a joke, for the man at the table gave a loud guffaw, and his two supporters went into an ecstasy of coarse laughter.

Presently there was a tap at the door, and upon its being opened there straggled in some twelve more un-washed creatures who, ranging themselves along one side

of the room, seemed methodically to prepare themselves for the work they had before them.

"To business," said the man at the table, and then without further preface he proceeded to go through a mock form of trial which the glorious Revolution of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, had in its infinite wisdom recognised as the most speedy and efficacious form of administering justice. Justice! What a burlesque of that sacred word, where guilt was declared without evidence, and condemnation was a mere matter of form.

What chance for Marguerite before such a tribunal? what hope even for the lad at her side? Wife of De Launay—so thought these frantic patriots—De Launay, erst friend of Louis, once frequenter of the Austrian woman's *salons*; pshaw! to ask the jury—justice forgive the term—"Are these royalist plotters or not?" was a mere waste of time. Even to require the acquiescing nods of twelve men was in such a case more than patriotism should have demanded. Plotters? yea, a thousand times! *canaille* that the already busily-worked slicer of heads—happy invention of the mechanical doctor, who by-and-bye was so nearly hoist with his own petard—must have to operate upon.

Swift from the room Marguerite and Bertrand are hurried, out into the prison yard, where stands a closed carriage to convey them to La Force, there to wait until the evening, when the death tumbril should come to collect its human freight like so many parcels, all for Samson, the *coiffeur* of the sovereign people—the last dresser of the royalists' heads!

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The evening is approaching, and patriotism, gasping from the effects of the blood-red sun, all day so fierce and burning, but now sinking in a blaze of golden glory in the west, gathers itself about the cooling streets to watch the coming of the condemned. It is near the time and the hour when infallible justice, after the fashion of the Revolution, is to be accomplished; and men and women collecting in groups together cajole one another in conversation into the belief that they are instruments in the hand of Heaven to regenerate their beloved France, and that in this crusade of massacre they are building up immortal fame for her and themselves. Poor, short-sighted souls! the vengeance you are invoking shall not stay its destroying swoop until it has swept too many of yourselves away also!

At the foot of the stage on which was fixed the guillotine stood two citizen soldiers—so they called themselves—of the sovereign people. It was their business to keep back too-eager citizens from pressing against the slender wood-work, and disturbing the perpendicular of the suspended knife that glittered in the rays of the departing sun.

There was a rattle of wheels on the stones, and amid a volley of abuse and execrations levelled at its occupants, the death tumbril drew up to discharge its load at the rear of the scaffold. The first to ascend was a woman, her head erect, her eye bold and defiant, her step unfaltering. She gave one glance towards the purple west, turned a look to heaven as if in prayer, and then proceeded, as calmly as if making her toilet, to bare her neck for the knife. But a few seconds, and she was lying strapped upon the plank. One of the soldiers at the foot of the scaffold,

curious to see who the victim was to be, turned his eyes upward, and for the first and last time since that fatal night down in the Pays d'Artois, Pierre Morel and Marguerite his wife met.

With a wild cry of despair he screamed aloud to the executioner to stop. But it was too late : the greedy knife gliding down, swept her into eternity ere the word came from his lips.

Gasping citizens standing around inquired in chorus, "What ails the worthy Pierre Morel?" for he was well known as the most merciless of patriots.

"You have murdered an innocent woman," he groaned in a broken voice, his face pale and haggard like one who had seen a horrible vision. "She was no traitor, she was a true citizen's wife—she was my wife!"

And again the glistening knife was raised aloft, and another intended victim mounted the scaffold—a bright, brave, gallant-looking lad, whose handsome, open countenance seemed to strike the crowd, and even to provoke expressions of sympathy and pity. Suddenly his eye looked downwards in front of him, and with a pleased smile of recognition he called out, "Father, good-bye!"

In less time than it takes to write, Pierre Morel with superhuman effort had climbed up on to the scaffold, and was standing erect upon it, between the executioner and the condemned. In a voice that made itself heard to all, he called aloud to the crowd, and the while putting his arm round the boy's neck, "Citizens, you all know me, what I have suffered, what I have endured : you know I am no royalist plotter, but a true servant of you all : that

I would sweep the accursed aristocrats away like chaff before the wind! I swear to you that this lad is my own flesh and blood, my son, my only child, with the spirit and soul of a patriot. I pray you say that he shall be spared at least until I have been permitted to go before the Court and speak for him."

He essayed to address them further, but there was no need.

That evening the death tumbril went back again to the prison, but not as it was wont—empty. Pierre rode in it, with his boy, accompanied by a multitude of sympathising patriots, who soon secured Bertrand's triumphant release and restoration to his father.

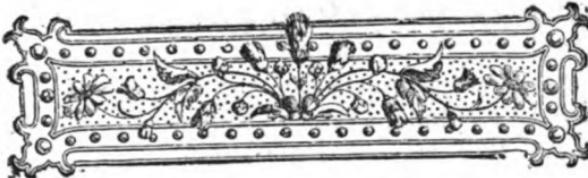
What followed must be briefly told. That same night Bertrand recounted to Pierre all that had led up to his mother's last noble act of self-sacrifice, and how the Countess and her two children were still at the Conciergerie. At risk of his own life, Pierre went before the tribunal the following morning, and recounted the story from beginning to end, concluding thus:—

"Citizens, it is I who was accused of the murder of the Count, and condemned for it, though innocent as any of you. I but found his bleeding corpse lying in the snow, and raising it to see if I could render him any assistance, was covered with the crimson stream that flowed in a deluge from his death-wound. They found me guilty, because, so shortly before the deed was done, I had been seen in the company of him whose knife had accomplished the fatal act. Heaven is my witness, I would not have hurt a hair of the Count's head; he was

a man of gentle loving heart, who knew no differences of station or position, and who to us all was a father and a friend—his interest in us always lively, his purse-strings ever open. For the lives of his dear ones now within the prison, I, Pierre Morel, whose patriotism not one of you can doubt, for I have proved it as you all well know, I intercede : give them up to me, let me do with them as I will ; surely in her death I have paid a heavy enough ransom."

They granted him his request ; but until some six years later, when a travel-stained dying man came to the refuge she had found herself and her children in England, seeking for shelter wherein to breathe his last, the Countess never knew to whom she owed her preservation. "Birds of a feather flock together." The doctrine of the old proverb nearly lost Pierre his head, and for Marguerite, ended we know how fatally.





“TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN.”

BEYOND all question, the Mermaid's Cave was the wonder of St. Oliph's. No visitor to that popular watering-place could be said to have properly investigated its claims upon public consideration unless he had inspected the beauties of this marvellous triumph of Nature's handiwork. Lying in the midst of a network of rocks, that were always covered at high water, it was very difficult of access; indeed, no entrance could be effected except just before or very soon after low tide. When at the flood, the small opening, through which at other times there was just room enough for a boat to pass, was completely closed up, and the densest darkness prevailed in the vaulted chamber within, which was like a huge mausoleum. The pleasure-boat keepers of St. Oliph's had very soon learnt that excursions to the Mermaid's Cave proved far more lucrative than any other marine trips, for most persons, nervous old ladies especially, felt how completely they were at the mercy of their guide, when they

found themselves gliding through the slimy narrow passage that led into it, and an extra shilling or two were always forthcoming "if the man would only be careful, and be sure and not run any risk." Once gained, no one could fail to be struck with the magnificence of the spectacle presented to the astonished gaze: as the light of the flaming torches reflected upon the roof of hanging crystals above, it seemed to reveal thousands upon thousands of glittering diamonds, just as if the picture of one of those gorgeous palaces described in the "Arabian Nights" had been realised. Then as the boatman shouted aloud to show off the echo, each shining cone seemed to repeat his tones one to the other, till the sound was lost in a gentle murmur that seemed to hover in mid-air.

One of the St. Oliph's pleasure-boats belonged to a boy of the name of Dicky Virtue, more familiarly known among the frequenters of the beach as the "Orphan." When he was yet in long clothes, he had lost both father and mother, by a terrible epidemic that had almost decimated the town, and owed his bringing up and education to the workhouse, from whose parental control he had emancipated himself at the age of ten, preferring to earn a precarious livelihood as a Jack-in-the-water to being apprenticed to a shoemaker.

Dicky was essentially of a business turn; he perfectly well understood that there was twelve pence in each shilling; and he equally appreciated the importance of economy. Somehow or other, by the time he was fourteen years old, he had accumulated sufficient capital to enable him to buy a small secondhand pleasure-boat, with which

the owner was parting on his retirement into private life, and having had her done up, commenced to invite the St. Oliph's public generally “to take a row.” The speculation turned out successfully; for, although he was so young, he had, so to speak, been brought up and educated on salt water, and was just as expert in the management of a boat as his older and more experienced brother boatmen. Naturally enough, the juvenile portion of the community were particularly fond of patronising Dicky, and it was extraordinary to observe the marvellous manner in which he had gained the confidence of papas and mammas. There is a well-used old saying, “The more you have, the more you want,” and so it was with our “jolly young waterman.” His worst fault was his avarice. Unlike others of his own age, he loved making money, and hated spending it. His greatest pleasure was to hoard it away in a little tin box, which, unknown to any one, he kept secreted in a hole that he had made in the floor of his room, underneath his bed. Every sixpence that he was obliged to spend gave him as much pain as drawing a tooth would have done. When he had had a particularly good day's work, he would sit down and count over his earnings such a number of times, grumbling all the while that he had not made more. This greediness could not long pass without notice, and gradually the boatmen of St. Oliph's came to shake their heads, and say, “If that Orphin goes on a-screwing and a-grinding hisself like that, he won't come to no good end.”

I am going to tell how his avarice made him to do something very wicked, and got him into great danger.

One fine afternoon, Dicky secured a promising pair of customers for a visit to the Mermaid's Cave, in the persons of an old lady and her little nephew. The day was lovely, the sea smooth as the face of a mirror ; in fact, a more suitable opportunity, both in respect of tide and weather, could not have been chosen. Now, this old lady, Mrs. Martin by name, had a habit of always carrying her purse in her hand, under the impression that it was safer there than in her pocket. How far she was justified in this opinion we shall presently see. All went as well as could be, the entrance to the Mermaid's Cave was duly gained, and after a good deal of fuss and entreaty on Mrs. Martin's part, to take every possible precaution, the interior was gained, and its beauties unfolded for the edification of Dicky's passengers. The good old lady was lost in astonishment and admiration, and, forgetful of her purse, clapped her hands in the ecstacy of her delight, which by some means or other gave it a jerk, and it went overboard. Great was her tribulation : what was she to do ? was there no possibility of recovering it ?

Dicky assured her in the most emphatic manner that there was not, adding "that the water was so deep as to render search useless." So Mrs. Martin returned to St. Oliph's in a very disconsolate state of mind, and minus her purse, fully satisfied that it was irrecoverably lost.

That same night, when all the St. Oliph's world was in bed and asleep, Dicky crept down to the beach, and putting a kind of dredge, called a "crawler," into his boat, launched her, and paddled his way softly towards the Mermaid's Cave. His pale face looked almost ghastly,

as the moon, suddenly appearing from behind a bank of leaden clouds, lit up the sleeping sea.

The sudden brightness startled him: he loved the darkness better than the light; for he knew, by the thumping of his heart against his side, and the clammy sweat of fear upon his face and hands, that the errand upon which he was bent was a bad one. The wind coming down from the cliffs, beneath whose shadow he was making his way, was moaning and sighing as if in pain and pity. Above, the surface of the heavens seemed shifty and threatening. Had he not better turn back, instead of prowling thus in the silent night upon the great highway of waters, with a shameful object in his heart? So he asked himself; but then there rose before his eyes the vision of the fat, comfortable-looking purse, and he thought of what it might contain; prudence was conquered, honour abandoned, all was forgotten save the greedy avarice that hurried him on through the narrow entrance of the Mermaid's Cave. Then he fastened the torch he had lighted in the bow of his boat, and set himself to the work of fishing up the lost treasure. After a long search, just as he was about to abandon further labour as hopeless, he caught the fish he had been trying to hook. But now he had it within his reach, he shrank from touching it with his hands. He dragged the crawler in, and flung it with its contents into the corner of the boat. And now to make the best of his way home.

In the prosecution of his evil enterprise he had forgotten the existence of time and tide, that wait for no man!

The entrance to the Mermaid's Cave was closed up by a barrier of waters, and Dicky knew in a moment that he would have to wait some four or five hours before he could escape from his imprisonment. Locked in his adamantine chamber, the thickness of whose walls shut out all sound of the outer world, he could not hear the storm that was raging without.

Judging from the time at which he had started, Dicky was convinced that it was now not far off midnight, and that the earliest hour at which he could hope to obtain his release could not be much before four o'clock in the morning, when the fishermen portion of the St. Oliph's world would be stirring. What account was he to give of himself? As is always the case with a novice in crime, the reaction that followed on its commission brought conscience down in a full flood upon him. Hitherto Dicky had only felt that he was greedy and avaricious; now he knew that he was a thief. As he picked up the purse from the corner into which he had thrown it, the touch seemed to burn his fingers, the air was as if filled with faces that frowned threateningly upon him; he sank down upon one of the seats of his boat, and his head dropped between his knees for very shame.

Suddenly the torch went out, and he was left in darkness as of the grave, with no means of rekindling the flame, thus to wait till the time of his liberation should arrive. So through the gloom he remained, with no companion but his own bitter thoughts.

Slowly the tide fell, till at length the top of the tiny arched passage, through which access was gained, was un-

covered. As the entrance opened, the roar as of distant thunder startled Dicky from his reflections. What could it be? A momentary thought answered him. Slowly he moved his boat through the narrow passage, but just as the bow got to the end, he felt a shock that drove him back almost into the cave, wetting him to the skin, and introducing an unpleasant quantity of water into his craft.

Then he knew that the Storm Fiend was abroad, and that he must remain a prisoner till that fiend had played out his wild dance on the crests of the green billows. How long would it be? He began to feel that he was in peril; retribution had followed swift upon his sin, and, as yet, he could not tell how his punishment would end. Once more the tide flowed and shut him in in impenetrable darkness. Shivering and frightened, he realised how entirely he was in the hands of Providence. Then, when the waters receded again, he sought to make his escape, but with a more disastrous result than on the first occasion. One of the planks of his boat was sprung by the force of the wave that met him, and left an aperture through which the water leaked. Was he to be drowned in the gloomy vault? Dicky was no coward; he had borne up wonderfully, for a boy of his age, under his perils; but now he began to grow hopeless, and falling on his knees, he prayed as only human beings can pray when the shadow of death is upon them. Slowly the water made its way into the boat, gathering about him; but still he remained entreating pardon and mercy. Then, as if the good spirit had come down over raging tempest and angry storm, piercing in its ethereal flight

the rocky walls, and resting upon his soul, a bright happy feeling stole over him, despair fled away, and he felt in his heart that he was forgiv'en. Inspired with sudden vigour, he applied himself energetically to the task of baling out the water from his boat, and, as if to encourage him in his labour, a ray of sunlight came dancing in through the watery passage. For two whole nights and a day had the tempest kept him in confinement, and now he saw that its anger was spent, and that he was free to pass out of his prison a wiser, though very hungry boy.

Mrs. Martin's purse was duly restored to her, but not without Dicky's confessing to her the course he had contemplated taking with it. He who guides the destinies of men, in whose hands rests the ordering of time and tide, had made even the waves His ministers, to bring this lad back to his duty, and to teach him in future years to be honourable and upright in all his dealings.





WHERE THERE'S A WILL THERE'S A WAY.

PART I.

THROUGH the unceasing exertions and indomitable energy of the head master, Dr. Lawson, Rosleigh Grammar School had, at the time of my story, risen to occupy a very prominent and important position among the educational establishments of the country. When he assumed the reins of management, its fortunes had fallen sadly into decay, owing to the careless indifference and miserable incompetency of his predecessor in office ; no longer, as of yore, did it send up the best scholars to the university, and the sagacious professors at *Alma Mater* began to whisper among themselves that the old Blankshire school was going to the dogs, and that the sooner it was shut up the better.

At last, and not a bit too soon, the dictator, who had so disastrously presided over the destinies of Rosleigh, slept with his fathers, and the trustees of the foundation set

about looking for some one to fill his place ; but though they held out all sorts of tempting baits, in the shape of increased salary, and other lures of a like appetising character, somehow candidates were not forthcoming. In fact, it began to look very much as if they would have to close the premises, and retire from business.

With much the same sensations as those which are experienced by the captain of a waterlogged ship, when he finds himself passing in through the harbour entrance, Dr. (then Mr.) Lawson's application for the vacant post was received by the trustees of the Rosleigh foundation. His testimonials from Harton, where he had been one of the under-masters, were unexceptionable, while his manner and speech betokened the scholar and the gentleman. Like Cæsar, he might have exclaimed, *Veni, vidi, vici!* for, after little more than five minutes' conversation, he was informed that the offer of his services was accepted ; and in less than a fortnight he was installed in his new position. And right well did he become it, and show himself equal to its duties and responsibilities.

Slowly, but surely, the number of boys increased—the best possible evidence that the reputation of Rosleigh was improving—till the list reached its full complement, and already many names were down in order, so that those who purposed filling up the vacancies as they might occur, should have the opportunity of securing their place in good time. Dr. Lawson had not undergone his experience at Harton for nothing, he was a staunch and enthusiastic believer in the monitorial and fagging systems, and was of opinion that the more a boy is made to depend upon him-

self, the better man will he become in after years. Above all, he sought to foster a feeling of sympathy and good-will between the masters and the pupils, he himself setting the example to encourage confidence from the boys to him, always impressing upon them the trust and faith he had in their honour. How right he was in doing thus, the name that Rosleigh gained under his rule, and the loving memory in which his old pupils held him, are proofs that cannot be contradicted. There must be something great as well as good in a man who can weather the foolish prejudices of schoolboys, and gain not only their respect and obedience, but their affection.

It was a lovely summer's afternoon, and full advantage was being taken of the glorious July day by the Rosleigh School Eleven. The annual match of Past and Present was going on, and had as usual attracted a large number of visitors. The "old boys" had just finished their innings to the tune of 175 runs, and the short interval that was to elapse before "the Present" went to the wickets, was being occupied in the consumption of certain cooling drinks most considerately supplied by Dr. Lawson, who, with his wife and daughter, always put in an appearance on these festive occasions, and evinced much interest and pleasure in the proceedings.

The score was a long one to go in against for young players; and Barnard, the captain of the school eleven, knowing the capabilities of his team, felt it his duty to impress upon the two he was sending in first the necessity for playing carefully and steadily.

"Mind, Pretor," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, to

one of them, a fine strapping lad, apparently about seventeen, "you are to keep your wicket up for the first hour, and then go in for hitting as much as you like."

"Most noble captain, I will endeavour so to do; but the glorious game abounds in accidents, and, as you are doubtless aware, they will occur in the best regulated establishments," was the rejoinder of the young gentleman so addressed, who was commonly known as "Cheeky Pretor," a title for which, as a faithful biographer, I am bound to say he was duly qualified. It must not be supposed that thereby I intend to convey the notion that he was a disagreeable and unpopular boy with his school-fellows; on the contrary, every one liked him. He was the terror of bullies, and the adoration of all the small boys, who always found in him a sure champion and avenger.

Charlie Pretor was a very idle fellow. There is no use disguising the fact; and as I hope to make peace for him by-and-bye, it is just as well to make a clean breast of it at once. That he was kind-hearted, generous, and honourable, masters and boys admitted alike; that he neglected his work and wasted his time was a fact equally indisputable. He had no application—could never set himself down methodically to learning his lessons or doing his work, but would put it off till the last minute, with results, in the earlier part of his career at Rosleigh, of a singularly painful character. On more than one occasion Dr. Lawson had almost made up his mind to send him away from the school, but Mrs. Lawson, with whom Charlie was a great favourite, was a staunch advocate in his behalf, and she

never pleaded with her husband in vain. So he remained at Rosleigh, gradually ascending in the school, till, at the time we make his acquaintance, he had just been promoted into the fifth form, where there was every prospect of his remaining until he left Rosleigh for good and all.

I must here wander away from the beaten track for a moment, to enter into certain details that cannot be omitted. Attached to the Rosleigh foundation were two exhibitions of £10 a year each, which were, after all, but poor things, and little calculated to incite any very vigorous competition. Since Dr. Lawson's accession to power, however, two or three more valuable prizes had been founded, and in the early part of the year in which my story is laid an old pupil of his of the name of Beauchamp had died, and bequeathed a sum of money to the trustees of the school, for the creation of a scholarship of £50 a year, to be held for three years, to be called the Lawson Scholarship. It was open to the boys generally, but it may readily be understood that only the seniors were likely to compete for it. No date had yet been fixed on for the examination of the candidates, but it was generally understood that it would take place towards the end of the present midsummer quarter, and those who intended offering themselves had already commenced reading hard, in anticipation. Undoubtedly, there was every prospect that the first competition for the Lawson Scholarship, though select as far as the numbers were concerned, would be none the less severe.

And now to return for the present to the cricket-ground and Dr. Lawson, who is not in the least ashamed to show

that he is getting very much excited as to the ultimate result of the match, and becomes quite nervous and restless, as the fall of each wicket makes the chances of success for the boys more remote. Charlie still remains to the fore, and has long since exceeded the hour allowed him by the captain to play steady. Barnard has come in and gone back to the tent again, without doing anything remarkable; and though "the Present" are still thirty runs behind their opponents, there are only two more to go in to aid Charlie in supplying the deficiency.

"How splendidly Charlie is playing!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawson, as that young gentleman made a smart hit for four. She was delighted to see her favourite showing forth to such advantage, and inwardly flattered herself for having rescued him from the expulsion that, unknown to him, had so often threatened him.

"Bravo, Pretor! capital! splendid hit!" shouted the Doctor, standing up to see how far the ball had gone, and clapping his hands enthusiastically. All Master Scapegrace's shortcomings and grievous misdemeanours in the matter of Latin prose and such-like nuisances, as he termed them, were forgotten, ay, and forgiven too, at that moment; it was enough for his master that he was putting together a splendid score in faultless style, and might likely enough secure victory for his side. What if the metre of his last hexameter exercise limped and halted? the lameness of his versification had not extended to his legs, which carried him between the wickets with marvellous activity.

To make a long matter short, Charlie did win the

match, carrying out his bat with no less than ninety-four runs attached to his name,—a performance which was rewarded with loud and general applause. Foremost amongst those who congratulated him was the Doctor himself, who at the same time conveyed to him a message to the effect that Mrs. Lawson wished him to come in and have tea with her. Charlie was only too pleased to receive the invitation, and hurried away as quickly as he could to his room, to make himself tidy, preparatory to appearing in the Doctor's drawing-room.

How often it happens, when we are in the happiest frame of mind imaginable, and feel inclined to regard things in their most roseate aspect, that something happens which suddenly dispels all the sunshine and brightness! Young and old both learn this, and feel it according to their condition. As Charlie hastened up from the cricket-ground, he was as contented and joyous as boy could be; he had made a splendid score, had gained the victory for his side, and was once again restored to the Doctor's favour. When he got to his room he found a letter from his father, which drove the smile from his cheek, the laughter from his eye, and startled him to serious reflection. It ran thus:—

“Cleveland Square, July 4th, 18—.

“**M**Y DEAR SON,—I am very sorry to have to write and tell you that we are all in very great trouble at home; but as you are getting a big fellow now, and will soon have to leave Rosleigh, sooner even than I ever expected, I think you ought to know what has happened. You

have often heard me speak of a Financial Company, in which I had invested a great deal of money, and which I have always regarded as perfectly safe and trustworthy. Yesterday morning I was well-nigh crushed by receiving a circular informing me that, owing to the secretary having absconded, leaving behind him forgeries and defalcations to an enormous amount, the directors had felt compelled to appeal to the Court of Chancery to wind up the concern. Thus my whole income, with the exception of a slender competency, has been swallowed up; in fact, I very much doubt, at the moment, whether I shall be able to keep you at Rosleigh till the end of the year, as I could have wished. I fear, my dear boy, you have scarcely been as industrious as you might; but then, perhaps, you are not so much to blame as I am myself for having encouraged you in the notion that I should be able to provide for you. It grieves me much to think that I must abandon my long-cherished notion of sending you to Oxford; but that is now, of course, quite out of the question. You need not mention the contents of this letter to any one; but, at the same time, do not allow it to make you unhappy. The holidays will soon be here, and then we can settle what is best to be done. Your mother desires me to send you a kiss; she is too much out of spirits to write to you herself. God bless you, my boy; and with my best love,

"Believe me, your affectionate father,
"GEORGE PRETOR."

It may readily be understood that the news thus con-

veyed to him was most unexpected. He had become so accustomed to having everything from home that he wanted, that he had never paused to ask himself how it was provided. There are some people in this world who would sleep life away in calm indifference, but for some great misfortune happening to them, that awakens them to their uselessness. Charlie was one of these. Till now he had idled and frittered away all the golden opportunities of education provided him ; but the season of indolence was passed, and henceforth nothing remained for him but to put his shoulder to the wheel, and endeavour, as far as possible, to make up for lost time. His father's letter seemed to inaugurate a new period in his existence ; the past was as an old jacket, that he had taken off and thrown into the dusthole,—so full of patches and tatters that he was glad to hide it from his eyes.

Both the Doctor and Mrs. Lawson were much surprised at the change in Charlie's manner that evening. He was so quiet and yet earnest in all he said—quite different to his ordinary rattling, noisy style of conversation—that he astonished them, and, I may add, puzzled them considerably. It was as if the careless, thoughtless lad had been transformed into the serious, thinking man.

As he shook hands with the Doctor, and said good night, he remained for a moment, as if he wished to add something.

"Have you anything you want to say to me, Pretor? because, if you have, come along with me into my study," inquired the head master.

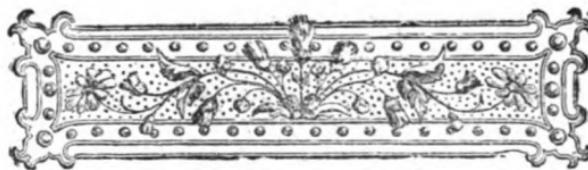
"No, sir ; nothing particular. I only wanted to know

when the examination for the Lawson Scholarship will take place," was the answer.

"It is not yet arranged," replied the Doctor; "but I hope to be able to announce the date in the course of to-morrow."

And with that Charlie went away to his room. When he reached it—for he had one all to himself, the agreeable consequence of being a favourite with Mrs. Lawson—he sat down by the open window. No need to disclose the communing he held with himself—the retrospect of the past, the resolution for the future. There was a bright star that, shining in the heavenly firmament, seemed to unfold to him his destiny,—a beacon of hope and encouragement. And he remembered that far up above, in realms beyond, dwelleth the Unseen, with whose help all things are possible for mortal man to accomplish. The school clock struck twelve, and roused Charlie from his reverie. And then he went to bed and slept on it.





PART II.

THE following morning, after Prayers, Dr. Lawson, instead of dismissing the various respective classes to their masters as usual, desired all to remain seated.

"I have," he said, "this morning received a letter from the trustees of the scholarship so generously founded by Mr. Beauchamp, informing me that Mr. Sutton, of St. Olave's, Oxford, who is to be the examiner, has fixed upon this day three weeks as the date on which the examination shall take place. As you are aware, that will be four days before the holidays. Those, therefore, who purpose going in for it had best come up to my desk now, and put their names down."

Some little interest was, naturally enough, felt throughout the school as to those who would offer themselves as candidates for the new and valuable prize, though, as I before stated, it was commonly understood that it would be confined to the seniors. The Doctor's suggestion was at once adopted, and five out of the eight monitors, and three of the sixth form, walked up to his desk and wrote their names down. It was supposed that these would be

all. What was the astonishment of the whole school to see Charlie quietly rise from his seat and follow their example!

Dr. Lawson himself was thunderstruck. At first he fancied that Charlie was up to one of his old tricks, and doing this merely out of bravado; but when he looked into the boy's eyes, so full of earnest resolve, and saw the expression of determination on his face, remembering the while his altered manner the previous evening, he felt that some incomprehensible change had come over him that would find a solution by-and-by.

As Charlie returned to his seat, not a few facetious remarks were addressed to him, for all thought that Cheeky Pretor was only up to one of his larks, and that as to really going in for the examination, no serious idea of doing so had ever entered his brain. But, instead of laughing and winking his eye in acknowledgment of the chaff that met him, he turned fiercely on one of the aggressors, and whispered angrily to him,

"If you have anything to say, say it after school, and then I will show you how I treat those who interfere in my affairs."

The other candidates looked upon him as quite out of the race for the Lawson Scholarship; in fact, Cunningham and Leycester, between whom the real contest was supposed to be, never gave his pretensions a moment's thought. There was only one person who really knew what Charlie was capable of, and that was the master of his form, Mr. Seymour, who loved the boy from his heart, and had readily responded to his appeal to coach him up in play-

time in certain subjects in which he was deficient. Owen Meredith says somewhere,

"Talk not of genius baffled, genius is master of man ;
Genius does what it must, talent does what it can."

And each day Mr. Seymour learned to appreciate the truth of the passage. Charlie seemed to pick up things by inspiration; he even astonished himself by the way in which teaching, that he had heard during past years and paid little heed to, now came back to him, as fresh and vivid as when it fell from the master's lips. Euclid was his weak point; do what he might, the various propositions would jumble themselves together in his head, producing the most hopeless confusion. In this respect Cunningham was greatly to be dreaded as an opponent, for he was famous throughout the school as a mathematician, and had hitherto distanced all his fellows.

"Never mind, Pretor," said Mr. Seymour, when they had entered on the last week preceding the examination; "what you lose in mathematics you will make up in classics, that I am quite sure of. Cunningham will have hard work to beat you there."

Through the whole three weeks that intervened between the Doctor's announcement and the day of the examination, Charlie worked with a pluck and perseverance that astonished everybody, and no one more so than Dr. Lawson. As for Mrs. Lawson, she was in ecstacies, and fully availed herself of the opportunity to crow over her husband.

"I told you so, my dear. I knew he would change some

day, and be a better boy, and do great things. I shall not be surprised if he gets the scholarship."

"That is simply impossible," answered the Doctor, shaking his head; "in addition to the want of necessary preparation, he has not had anything like the opportunities of Cunningham, or, in fact, of any of the other competitors. However, it will do him no harm, undergoing an examination, and I am only too agreeably surprised to find that he can work so steadily."

It was the evening before the examination, and Mr. Sutton had arrived, and was dining with the Doctor. Charlie was in his room, once more sitting by the open window, this time with a book in his hand, which he was evidently studying closely. Presently he shut it with a sigh of relief, and, jumping up, said to himself,

"Thank goodness, that puts the finishing touch! I'm loaded up to the muzzle, and couldn't stand another grain of cramming without bursting. I'll go and have a game at rackets, it will wake me up; and I want something to stir my stumps, for they are stiff enough after this three weeks' coaching."

An hour later, and Charlie was lying on his bed with a broken arm, waiting to have it set. In playing rackets, he had slipped and fallen on the hard flags, his arm snapping underneath him like a twig. The mere bodily pain he had borne like a hero; and, though his face was deadly pale, and he felt very weak, he was in full possession of his senses. But he was in an agony of mind. After all his exertions, his three weeks' work, his right arm would be useless, and he must give up all notion of going in for the

Lawson Scholarship. The thought of this drove him almost mad ; and when the medical man did arrive, he found his patient in a very feverish and excited state, and with every predisposition to be delirious. However, the disagreeable operation of setting the injured limb was satisfactorily accomplished, and Charlie was left in charge of Mrs. Lawson, who had come to him the moment she heard of his accident, with strict injunctions that he was to be kept very quiet. As soon as his room had been got into a little order, the kind-hearted, motherly woman took a chair, and sat down by his bedside. The lad's hand was lying outside on the counterpane ; she took it between her own, and smoothed it so tenderly, and with such gentle soothing, that a gratified smile stole over his face, and his eyes opened on her with an expression of gratitude. Ay, Charlotte Lawson, schoolmaster's wife though you were, there are many big strong men now who bless your kindly face and goodness, and remember with affection how thoughtful you were for them when they were schoolboys at Rosleigh.

Charlie lay quite quiet and still for some time ; but at last he said, in quite a firm voice, "Do you think, ma'am, I might see Mr. Seymour?"

"I think, my dear boy, you had better not," answered Mrs. Lawson, somewhat surprised at his request. "At least, wait till to-morrow morning."

"Oh, please, do let me," persisted Charlie ; "it really won't do me any harm, and I do want to, particularly."

"Well," thought Mrs. Lawson, "there can be no great danger, after all."

So Mr. Seymour was sent for, and came at once. To tell the truth, he was greatly upset by Charlie's accident, and dreadfully disappointed that he was thus placed *hors de combat* as far as that examination was concerned.

"Pretor, I'm very sorry for this," he said, as he went up to the bedside. "It really is most unfortunate that you will have to give up going in for the scholarship."

"Give it up, sir!" was the answer. "I don't mean to give it up. Why I asked to see you was, that I wanted you to suggest some way or another that I may not have to give it up."

"But you know, Charlie," interrupted Mrs. Lawson, about to point out the serious consequences that might follow from his undergoing any excitement in his present condition; but Charlie turned appealingly to her.

"Oh, ma'am, please don't say so. I have set my heart on having a try for it, and it will make me far worse to be disappointed."

I cannot give the whole of the conversation that passed; it resulted, however, in both Mrs. Lawson and Mr. Seymour going down and having an interview with the Doctor and Mr. Sutton. The latter at once suggested that Charlie should have the examination-papers to do in his own room, and that Mrs. Lawson should write the answers from his dictation. Here was the whole difficulty got rid of at once; the only obstacle that remained was the consideration as to whether it might not injure the lad's health, and delay his recovery. Then up spoke Mr. Seymour, who said that he knew Charlie would suffer a great deal more by a refusal, than if permission were granted him; and so it was agreed that nothing should

be said to the medical man about it. The course suggested to be taken with reference to Charlie's examination was duly conveyed to the other competitors for the scholarship, and they readily acquiesced therein, having full confidence in Mrs. Lawson's fairness, and an equal belief in the utter hopelessness of his chance.

The last day of the term had arrived, the prizes were to be distributed, and the successful candidate for the Lawson Scholarship would be announced. On this occasion, the parents and friends of those boys who lived within a convenient distance always assembled in great force, consequently the proceedings were of a highly interesting and impressive character. Mr. Sutton had been up nearly half the night, reading the papers of the competitors for the scholarship, and had been occupied all the morning in his room, doing the same; so that whoever the successful one was, his name was known to the examiner alone.

At twelve o'clock the bell was rung, for guests and boys alike to assemble in the big school-room, where Dr. Lawson would present the prizes, and the result of the scholarship examination be made known. Soon the place was quite full, with papas and mammas and pretty sisters, who, after a good deal of pushing and squeezing and pinching, managed to make themselves comfortable, and to settle down into something like order. The Doctor sat patiently at his desk, waiting for Mr. Sutton, who had just sent a message to say he was coming in a moment. Before him were ranged a goodly array of books, elaborate in bindings and gilt edges, which were presently to be distributed.

Among the visitors present was Mr. Preter, who had come down to see Dr. Lawson on the subject of removing Charlie from Rosleigh. He was sitting on one of the forms, with his son beside him. He seemed careworn and sad, though he listened attentively to all that was told him. One thing he was quite ignorant of, and that was Charlie's having been a candidate for the scholarship. When the father looked round and saw so many young and happy faces, it grieved him to think that his boy must say good-bye to school so soon, and go out into the world to work for his living. As for the young gentleman himself, he spoke quite quietly, without betraying in the least how anxiously and nervously he was awaiting Mr. Sutton's arrival.

He came at last; there was a bustle in the neighbourhood of the door, and Mr. Sutton hurried in, duly attired in cap and gown, and carrying the fatal list in his hand. He walked up to the Doctor's desk, said a few hurried words to him, and then, with a short preliminary clearing of the throat, addressed the school as follows:—

"Gentlemen of Rosleigh: It was with a feeling of profound satisfaction that I received, and accepted, the invitation of the trustees of the Lawson Scholarship, to conduct the first examination of candidates for the honour of holding a prize which alone, for the sake of him whose name it bears, may well be coveted by you all. I have no desire to prolong the suspense of those who have, on this first occasion, competed for it; I may, however, say that each and all of them have done credit and honour to Rosleigh. In framing the various papers, the object I

had in view was to discover the candidate most generally proficient in all the subjects. From what your head-master has said to me in the course of conversation, I fancy the result will take most of you by surprise ; but I am bound to add that he whose name I am about to mention is a considerable number of marks in advance of his opponents. Nothing remains for me to do but to declare that Charles Pretor has gained the Lawson Scholarship."

For a moment, masters and boys sat perfectly dumb with astonishment at this unexpected announcement. Then arose a burst of loud and enthusiastic cheering, that threatened to take the roof off the old school-house, and made itself heard down in Rosleigh village. During Mr. Sutton's address, Charlie had taken hold of his father's hand ; and then, when he heard his name read out, and knew he was successful, he whispered to him,—

" Better late than never, father ; I turned industrious at last, you see."

" God bless you, my boy !" answered Mr. Pretor, his eyes filled with tears, and his voice strangely shaky, pressing warmly the hand that rested in his.

" Pretor, come up to my desk," called out the Doctor; and Charlie rose and obeyed, stopping on his way, however, to bend down to Mrs. Lawson and kiss her outstretched hand ; and then he went on and stood in front of the Doctor's desk, in the presence of the whole school.

" My boys," said Dr. Lawson, " I can't allow this opportunity to pass without publicly congratulating Pretor on his success, which was as little expected by me as

yourselves." Here he shook hands warmly with Charlie. "I am glad to find that when he has made up his mind to success, he is as much at home in the examination-room as upon the cricket-field. My best wishes go with you, Pretor."

The allusion to Charlie's performance in the Past and Present match was the signal for another burst of applause, during which he walked back to his seat, and then Dr. Lawson proceeded to distribute the various prizes, and by-and-bye the ceremony came to an end. Cunningham and Leycester, though unsuccessful, were not ill-natured rivals; and when the formalities were over, they were the first to congratulate their hitherto despised opponent. And on this agreeable tableau the curtain falls.

In after years, Charles Pretor learned to bless that contest for the Lawson Scholarship, for it taught him that, however discouraging and unfavourable appearances, the race is not always with the swift, nor the battle with the strong, but that the true secret of success is to have the will to succeed, and the way will presently unfold itself.





“NOTHING VENTURE, NO- THING WIN.”

MONSIEUR BONHOMME sat in his counting-house, reading the letters he had received by the morning's post. Though the hands of the clock over his desk said that it wanted a quarter to nine, he had been working there more than an hour, and previously to that had taken his first breakfast, and made a lengthened tour of his garden, watering the flowers of which he was so proud, and spudding up the weeds he so loathed and hated in the fulness of his horticultural heart.

Besides being an early riser, he possessed an orderly and methodical mind, and whether it was his ledger and business books to be balanced, or his dinner-table to be arranged, or the weekly account with his washerwoman to be settled, everything in which he had an interest was conducted with the strictest regularity and accuracy.

Pierre Bonhomme was getting an old man. He and his father before him had, between the two of them, lived and traded in the old house in the corner of the Place de

la Bourse better than a hundred years, and the letters in which the name or style of the firm—"Bonhomme et Fils"—was painted over the tumble-down gate that led into the yard, were sadly illegible. Indeed, they might just as well have been obliterated altogether; first, because no one who did not possess lynx eyes could distinguish the characters; and secondly, because there was no "Fils" now: that is to say, Pierre's son was not in the business—in fact, he was very considerably above it—and though but a youngster of seventeen, prided himself on being one of the best-dressed and most fashionable dandies about Paris. It had been a great trouble to Papa Bonhomme, that his spoiled boy had shirked the business-collar he had sought to put around his neck. From the time when he had dandled his little Léon in his long clothes, the great idea of his life had been that the young gentleman should perpetuate the commercial glories of the honoured and well-known firm of "Bonhomme et Fils;" but he was doomed to disappointment, and found himself compelled to surrender all his cherished hopes.

I am sorry to have to record it of Master Léon, that he was far from being what he ought to have been: he had acquired a habit of spending money without thinking how hard it was to earn it; for Pierre Bonhomme had always kept his son's purse liberally supplied when at school in England. In tastes and ideas he was exceedingly precocious, and when scarcely sixteen had induced his father to allow him to leave school and come home; ostensibly to learn the routine of his business, but in reality to be a gentleman at ease.

With all his method and order, Pierre Bonhomme could refuse his son nothing, and so at the time of my story, we find Léon leading a wild and extravagant existence, and his father silently mourning the destruction of the castles in the air that in early days he had loved to build.

Next to his son, there was no person so dear to Pierre Bonhomme as Jacques Poucet, the orphan son of his dead sister, who though but just sixteen, had made himself invaluable in his uncle's counting-house, by his anxiety to work hard, and learn the routine of business. Let it not be supposed that he was a sneak or a schemer, who was trying to advantage himself at the expense of his cousin. He possessed—what we would there were a little more of in this world—gratitude, and remembered affectionately how, when his mother died, a thoughtful hand had been stretched out to him, and rescued him from beggary. What little he had, he owed it all to his uncle Pierre, and he sought to the best of his power to pay fitting interest on the debt, by assiduity and attention to his duties. When Léon left school, and came to try what business life was like, Jacques did everything he could to give him an agreeable impression, and to engage his sympathy and confidence. But Léon—who for no reason at all had long entertained a prejudice against him—chilled him by the coldness with which he met all his advances, and treated him with as little courtesy as if he had been the humblest menial. And yet Jacques yearned from his heart to gain the affections of the son of his benefactor, but all in vain. Do what he would, be he ever so thought-

ful, Léon stubbornly held aloof from him, and treated him with just the same contempt and hauteur as he did the old housekeeper and the porter.

But I am forgetting, in this preliminary ramble, Monsieur Bonhomme in his counting-house reading his letters. There was a large number of them, and it took him some little time to make himself acquainted with their contents. When he got to the last, and was reading it, he seemed somewhat put out.

"Ah! this is too bad," he grumbled to himself. "Just as I was thinking of taking a day's holiday, comes this tiresome note, requiring me to proceed on important business to Marseilles."

And then he sighed a sigh such as only a hard-worked man who has been robbed of a chance of relaxation can breathe.

"I must go at once," he continued, folding up the unwelcome letter hastily, and looking at his watch; "I shall be just in time to catch the day express."

At that moment a man came bustling in at the door.

"My dear Bonhomme," said the stranger, plumping down a small paper parcel upon the desk, "here are the four thousand francs due on our last account. I think you will find it all right; and as I can't wait any longer, good morning."

And with that, the unceremonious visitor disappeared as quickly as he had come.

"This is rather awkward," said Pierre, still talking to himself; "he couldn't have paid it at a more inconvenient time. I always take money to the bank myself, but

if I want to catch the train, I mustn't think of doing that to-day. And then none of the clerks are here, and Jacques hasn't come in from his morning's walk."

Almost at the same moment Léon appeared at the door. There was a strange look about him, which I may as well at once say was due to his having been playing cards the previous night, and losing more than he was able to pay. I say than he was able to pay because, foolishly indulgent though he was, his father had refused to make him any further allowance. He had scarcely entered the counting-house, when Jacques, fresh and with a heightened colour from his smart walk up to the Bois de Boulogne and back again, came briskly in. Monsieur Bonhomme, who had saluted his son most affectionately, turned at once to Jacques, telling him of his purposed journey to Marseilles, and desiring him, as soon as he had had his breakfast, to go over to the bank and pay in the four thousand francs, which, for the present, he put inside his desk without locking it.

Léon had at first turned away, disgusted at Jacques preventing the interview he had contemplated having alone with his father; but when he heard the four thousand francs mentioned, there was a dangerous expression in his eye that boded no good. With a hasty good-bye, Monsieur Bonhomme hurried to his sleeping-room, packed a few things in his carpet-bag, and in ten minutes was on his way to the railway station. Jacques made some civil remark to his cousin, but receiving no response, he took himself off to his breakfast.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, when, having discharged

several pressing duties, Jacques suddenly remembered the four thousand francs in his uncle's desk, and that he was to pay them into the bank. He was quite angry with himself for his forgetfulness, and determined to make up for it at once. What was his horror to find that the four thousand francs were gone!

Quicker than it takes to write, the thought flashed through his mind that his cousin was the thief. Why, he knew not, save that he had heard of Léon's extravagances, and knew that Monsieur Bonhomme had refused to pander to them further. It was a trying moment for Jacques: he knew that suspicion was like enough to fall on him, but he only gave a passing thought to that. The first and only thing that was uppermost in his mind was to bring back Léon, wherever he had gone, and with him, if possible, the four thousand francs intact. But where to find him? Whither had he gone? He might be in Paris, or flying away somewhere for safety. Looking out of the window, Jacques saw Prosper, the porter, standing at the yard gate.

"Have you seen Monsieur Léon?" he inquired hurriedly of him.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied the old man, "not half an hour ago; and just before he left he asked me to get the time-table of the Northern Railway. Why, how pale you look, Monsieur Jacques!" he added, gazing at Jacques' care-stricken face; "is anything the matter?"

"Nothing, Prosper, nothing," replied Jacques, withdrawing his head to the inside. "The Northern Railway!" he muttered to himself.

And then, as if a thought suddenly struck him, he rushed away upstairs to his own little room, and unlocking his desk, put what few savings he had stored away in it into his pocket. He informed no one of his purpose, but slipping out unperceived, hailed a carriage, and jumping into it, ordered the driver to convey him with all speed to the terminus of the Northern Railway. He had not paused to reflect; had he done so, he might have shrunk from the task he had imposed upon himself. But his thoughts were fixed on one who had been both father and mother to him, and whose heart would break if he were to find out that his son was a thief.

Through the whole of that day Jacques watched at the railway station, till, as evening came on, the officials about the place began to regard him as a suspicious person, who was loitering there for no good purpose. He was very tired and hungry, but he remained faithful to the duty he had assumed, and hoped against hope that his cousin would put in an appearance at last. The hour had arrived at which the night mail train for Calais was on the point of starting. There did not, however, seem to be many people likely to travel by it, and as the last warning bell rang, Jacques turned on his heel to go home. Léon was not going to take flight in that direction, he felt assured. As he was passing out through the station gates, his attention was attracted by a cab driving hurriedly in, the horse being urged along at the top of his speed. He would not throw away this last chance, so retracing his steps, he made for the ticket-office once more. As he entered it, he was just in time to see a figure that he was satisfied was no

other than that of his cousin, disappearing swiftly through the inner door on to the platform. He could not hesitate, so presenting himself at the little window where tickets were dispensed, he took one for Calais, and rushing on to the platform, regardless of the remonstrances of a surly official who tried to stop him, opened the door of one of the carriages in the train, that had already begun to move, and scrambled in as best he could. In five minutes more the steam horse was whirling him along through the outskirts of Paris, shrieking and screeching as if in astonishment at his temerity.

When the excitement of the moment was passed, and he could look about him, Jacques found that the carriage he was in had no other occupant but himself, and that he was to be alone for the next fifty miles. For he knew that the night mail only stopped three times on the journey between Paris and Calais. It has already been seen that Jacques was naturally very impulsive, and every minute's delay that kept him from his cousin's side seemed full of danger to the success of his enterprise. He looked out of the carriage window. It was a dark, gloomy night, and some heavy rain-drops fell upon his face, while the rushing of the wind almost took his breath away. But to wait till fifty miles had been traversed, and then run the risk of not seeing Léon at all, or if seeing him, to have to do so in company—Jacques scouted the idea, and was determined to make a daring effort, if possible, to avoid all these difficulties. Again he did not pause to reflect, but, opening the door, stepped out on to the long wooden step that ran along its full length, and closed it after him. Then

he remained still for a moment, for the guard, whose van was next behind, had just looked out. But it was only to take a glance at a train which came whizzing past on its way towards Paris, and then he disappeared.

Jacques was not slow to proceed with the daring enterprise he had resolved to undertake, but made his way along the wooden steps from carriage to carriage, glancing in at the windows as he passed unseen by the occupants, and thus till he had reached nearly to the second guard's van, which came next to the engine. Could he have been mistaken, after all, in the identity of the figure he had supposed to be that of his cousin? As he paused with sinking heart to put this question to himself, he happened to look in through the window of a first-class carriage, and there, all by himself, sleeping in the corner seat on the farther side, was Léon, and by his side a little black travelling-bag, which was fastened round his shoulder by a strap. Gently turning the handle of the door, Jacques opened it, and gliding softly in, shut it after him. He had played a bold game, but it seemed likely that he would win now. Léon was moving restlessly in his sleep, while his breathing was forced and heavy; every now and then he murmured something between his teeth, which were clenched together, but the words were inaudible.

"If he has but the money about him, and I can secure it without waking him," said Jacques to himself, "there is nothing to fear."

Stealthily he crept to Léon's side. The bag was resting on the arm of the seat in which Léon was sitting. Jacques tried to open it, but at first he could not. Then

he remembered how he had once heard Léon tell his father about a particular spring that was attached to it, and after a search that seemed to him to last hours instead of seconds, he lighted on it, and pressing it with his finger, the bag flew open. Almost at the same moment, Léon moved as if about to wake, and Jacques started back; but his alarm soon passed when he saw his cousin seemingly sink into a sounder sleep than before; and then looking into the bag, Jacques saw a packet lying at the bottom of it, which in an instant more he held in his hand. It was made up of the four thousand francs in bank-notes that had been paid to M. Bonhomme that morning. Having satisfied himself that they were all right in number, he put them into his pocket-book, and carefully closing the bag, ensconced himself in a seat, and prepared for the time when his cousin should awake.

There is no need to linger over what remains to be told. Neither Léon nor Jacques went as far as Calais that night. Indeed, when the mail train reached its first stopping-place, they got out together, and journeyed on no farther. If the reader had been there, he would have seen that the elder of the two lads was as a child in the hands of the younger, and seemed willing to let him do as he would with him. Monsieur Bonhomme, on his return from Marseilles, was agreeably surprised to find his son installed in the counting-house, at the desk by Jacques' side, working away with a will that gladdened his heart, and reinspired him with a hope that the glories of the old house of Bonhomme et Fils would yet be perpetuated. He never knew of Léon what we do. And

Jacques toiled pleasantly on as before, more than ever a son to M. Bonhomme, and a dear and loved brother to Léon. Perhaps one day, my children, I may tell you how Léon repaid the debt of gratitude he owed to Jacques.





THE "BLACK DRAGOON."

"Thro' the black night that sits immense around,
Lash'd into foam the fierce contending brine
Seems o'er a thousand raging waves to frown."

—Thomson.

SOMEWHERE under the cliffs, on the South Coast, lay the little fishing village of Gunnerstone, at least, if some dozen ricketty huts and a tumble-down jetty deserve the appellation. Isolated and cut off from anything like familiar intercourse with the rest of the world, its inhabitants led a wild, precarious existence, and some ugly stories were told of their predilection for plunder and wrecking. Many vessels had been known to go upon the Gunnerstone Reef in comparatively calm weather, when all hands might have been saved with little difficulty, but by some unaccountable mishap or other none were ever known to survive, and by the time the Coastguard men arrived they were astonished to find how quickly the ship herself had gone to pieces. Nature had made Gunnerstone almost inaccessible from the sea, save to the natives of the place, to whom alone a certain

narrow passage was known through which they could navigate their boats in safety up to the jetty. From the very edge of the beach to some half-mile out to sea stretched a long reef of sunken rocks, which the s on board the revenue cutter were wont to call the real Gunnerstone fishing-nets. Many and fatal had been the wrecks in this particular locality, and homeward and outward-bound always wished themselves well past it. It became obvious that the establishment of a lighthouse here was absolutely necessary, and after the usual amount of official circumlocution, and the preparation of a great many surveys and plans, things at length took a business-like turn, and the building of a lighthouse was commenced on a large rock at the extremity of the reef, which rose abruptly out of the water as if specially intended by nature to assist in this work of humanity. The construction proceeded but slowly, what with the caprices of the weather and the opposition offered by the inhabitants of Gunnerstone, who regarded the innovation much in the same way as a burglar would the establishment of a huge gas-lamp just in front of a house he contemplates robbing. It was many months before the revolving beacon sent its dazzling rays flashing out over the sea to warn passers-by of their propinquity to the ill-omened reef. When thoroughly finished, the lighthouse presented an appearance of strength and solidity that did infinite credit to the architect who had planned and the contractor who had built it. The interior was arranged so as to be as roomy as possible, in order to accommodate the two keepers and the boy who had charge of it; and the

lower part was divided into a sitting and sleeping-room. Outside, a couple of substantial outbuildings had been erected, which in the summer-time were used as residences; while all round the upper surface of the rock huge blocks of granite had been raised one on the other, making a wall of tremendous thickness, which shielded the outbuildings, and left a considerable space protected, which, with marvellous ingenuity, had been turned into a garden, though I fear its productive powers were not of a very high order. Down one side of the rock was cut a rough staircase, by means of which the keepers were enabled to get to their boat, whenever they had occasion to take a trip to the shore. Their life was a very uneventful, and yet withal a very stirring one; for in winter-time, when the storm was at work, the waves came dashing up against their house in wild confusion and noise as of thunder, racing one with the other as if to see which could send its flecks of foam nearest the lighthouse lantern.

On the 24th of December, 18—, about five o'clock in the afternoon, three people were standing in the little yard at Gunnerstone Lighthouse, looking out towards the sea. Above them the bright glare shot forth into the darkness from the lantern, and disclosed the white crests on the waves as they came rolling in grandly from mid-ocean.

"It will blow hard afore morning, Bill," said old Seth Lawrence, wiping from his cheek a great drop of salt spray as cold as an icicle; "the wind's been a chopping and shifting about the last eight and forty hours, but he seems to have come to anchor in the right quarter at last,

and he's going to give us a taste of his quality, or I'm a lubber. It ain't very cheerful for Christmas folks, specially them's as at sea. Hallo, that's a damper," he added, as one wave more daring than its fellows ran up the side of the rock and sent a deluge of salt water hissing over the granite wall into the yard.

"I tell you what it is, Uncle Seth," interrupted the younger member of the two he had addressed, who had come in for his share of wetting, "I am not going to stand out here to get soaked to the skin. I have a regard for my constitution, if you haven't, so allow me to wish you a very good evening." The speaker at once suited the action to the word, and disappeared through the door into the lighthouse, and his example was speedily followed by his two companions. The exchange from the cold and wet outside to the warmth and comfort within was in every way agreeable, and in a little while tea was ready, and the party sat down fully prepared to enjoy it. While they are so engaged, just a word or two about them.

Seth Lawrence was a fine, muscular man, who had seen plenty of rough service in his time, but appeared none the worse for the buffeting. He was the very "*beau ideal*" of an Englishman, cool, resolute, and indomitable, and in every way suited for the post in which we find him. Neither chick nor child had Seth, but his nephew Charlie was to him as a son, and the lad in his turn looked upon him in the light of a father. Gunnerstone Reef was scarcely the spot on which to spend Christmas Day as a matter of preference, but with these two, who had no ties of kindred or relationship on shore, it was

just as good as any other. Not so was it with Bill Marston: he was anything but satisfied with the arrangements that compelled him to eat his plum-pudding in the lighthouse, and had been making himself miserable for some time past about the hardness of his lot. But all the sulking in the world could not alter the state of affairs, and so he himself began to think, as he sat down to tea on the evening when we first make his acquaintance. He was short and somewhat squat in figure, and by the side of Seth presented very much the same appearance as does a steam-tug in the company of a screw frigate. But though Bill Marston was short in stature, he was an awkward customer to get to close quarters with, as a certain cheeky Jack tar, who came with the revenue cutter to the lighthouse on one occasion, had good cause to remember. He was a singularly good hand with a rifle, and when the sea was calm, and no craft were in the way, would amuse himself practising. He had lately been giving Charlie lessons in shooting, and his pupil progressed with a rapidity that excited his hearty admiration. Just a word or two of that young gentleman, and then "*revenons à nos moutons.*" Charlie Fairfield was an orphan; his mother, Seth's sister, had died when he was quite a baby, never having quite recovered from the shock her husband's being lost at sea in a storm had occasioned her. With her last breath she bequeathed her blue-eyed baby boy to Seth, and he, with tears coursing down his brown cheeks, swore "that he'd stick to the kid through foul and fair weather, and as long as he'd a shilling in the locker the 'young 'un' should have half." And, as I

have said before, no oath was ever more religiously kept. Charlie was put out to school and received a good sound commercial education, for which Seth found the money, and, at length, when he thought that he had had enough of his books, he made a strongre presentation to his employers, and persuaded them to give Charlie a berth at the lighthouse, where we now find him. Story-tellers have a dreadful habit of always making their favourite character very handsome, in fact, an Admirable Crichton of the most approved type; and I am afraid that if I attempt to sketch a portrait of mine, I shall lay the paint on too thick and spoil the effect. Therefore I leave the task to the imagination of my hearers, merely adding that Charlie was brave and true as steel, and loved Seth with his whole heart.

Tea was over and cleared away, and Seth had been upstairs to see that the lights were all right, and was now taking it easy in a comfortable arm-chair.

"Look here, Bill," he said, performing that process which is known as washing the hands with imaginary soap, "as it's Christmas Eve, we'll treat ourselves to a drop of grog, and make ourselves cosy."

"All right, mate," answered Bill, evidently quite ready to enjoy himself after the prescription suggested; "here's the bacca-jar, and presently, if Charlie don't mind, we'll get him to spell out a bit of reading."

"So we will, so we will, mate," echoed Seth. "Fetch out the groceries, lad, and then I'm blowed if we shan't be as square and ship-shape this here festive season as any of your land lubbers."

Charlie bustled about, got out the rum and all the other necessary etceteras, and then made himself excessively comfortable on one of the lockers with the book, from which he was to hold forth for the delectation of the company. It was the ever-green "Pickwick Papers," and soon the roar of the wind and storm outside was almost lost in the shouts of laughter that Sam Weller's eccentricities and witticisms excited.

Charlie had been reading uninterruptedly for about half an hour, when Seth suddenly jumped up from his chair, exclaiming, "I could swear I heard some one moving in the yard outside."

"Lor, mate, you must be a dreaming," answered Bill; "we're not likely to be troubled with visitors, let alone on such a night as this; but, as I'm nearest the door, I'll just take a look out."

Bill Marston rose from his seat and did as he said. The wind came driving into the room, rude, bitter, and searching, threatening to put out their lamp.

"Bless your heart," continued he, shutting the door quickly, "there arn't nobody, it was only fancy;" and with that the two resumed their seats and the reading continued.

But presently Bill Marston in his turn cried to Charlie to stop, and, putting his finger on his lips, crept once again to the door, whispering as he did so,—

"Seth, you're right, mate, there's some mischief up, and we've got company on the rock that we don't know about yet."

Seth Lawrence was up in a moment like a lion.

"Hold, Bill, a moment," he cried, "don't open the door till we've put the light out, and we'd best take a six-shooter apiece, for we don't quite know how many friends we may have to receive."

"Ten to one it's some of those thieving scoundrels from Gunnerstone, come to see if they can catch us asleep in order to play tricks with the lights, but they'll find we're up to their little games."

Seth and Bill hastily pulled on their rough pea-jackets, invested their heads in their sou'-westers, and, having looked at their revolvers to see that they were properly loaded, put out the lamp and opened the door. As they did so a dark object slid away from before it and was lost in the gloom.

"That cove's been listening through the keyhole," whispered Bill to his companion.

"Well, he didn't hear much good of himself," replied Seth; and then he added in a louder tone, "Now then, you skulks, come out and let's see what you're made of. I've got a nice taste of cold lead for each of you."

"Two can play at that game, Seth Lawrence," answered a deep voice from out of the darkness: "look to yourself."

There was a flash, a report, and Bill Marston was standing by himself.

"You murdering dogs," he cried, firing in the direction whence the voice had come, "good luck send this through one of your ugly heads."

This wish seemed to have been fulfilled, for there was a yell of some one in pain. Meanwhile Charlie had run out at the first sound of firearms, and found his uncle

lying on the ground. Seth whispered hoarsely to Bill when he fell,—

"Get back into the lighthouse, lad : their game is to douse the lights, and get some ship ashore in this storm ; leave me here, they can't do worse with me. Get thee back, get thee back, or there will be more lives lost before the morning."

But Bill was not to be thus defeated ; he would not go and leave his mate alone, but remained resolutely by him, prepared to fall by his side if necessary.

"Charlie, lad, go you inside," he said hurriedly to the boy, "take you care of the lights, stick to them to the last, and die rather than give in."

To hear was to obey. Charlie ran inside the lighthouse, closed the door, and turned the key. Not a minute too soon, for a moment after a strange hand was laid upon the latch, and a rough voice called for admission. He was startled for a moment, and his heart thumped against his side ; but then he thought of his uncle Seth, and how he would have behaved under like circumstances, while Bill Marston's words rang in his ears : "Stick to them to the last, and die rather than give in." In an instant fear was forgotten, and he was prepared to fight to the last, come what might. This he knew, that he had to contend with enemies who would show him no mercy. They were bent on extinguishing the lights, and they would not stop at murder if it were necessary to secure the successful prosecution of their nefarious enterprise.

It was for Charlie to defend them as long as life and strength were his ! His eyes turned to the clock ; it was only eight. What an age till daybreak !

To thoroughly barricade and fasten the door was his first consideration. It was well and strongly built of oak, strengthened here and there with iron ribs, and secured by three bolts and a huge bar that passed immediately across the centre. All these were duly pushed into their places by Charlie, regardless of the hammering and knocking that was going on outside. This done, he hurried upstairs to see that the lights were burning all right ; wick, oil, and reflectors were all in perfect order, and might in the emergency be left to themselves. They would do their duty till morning if only the wreckers' fingers could be kept at a respectful distance. Satisfied as to these particulars, Charlie hurried downstairs again to defend the door. How thankful did he now feel to Bill for the lessons he had given him in shooting! There was another revolver lying at the bottom of the locker ; he took it up, loaded it carefully, and then prepared himself for the siege.

The wind still howled and whistled, while the thunder of the waves upon the rock was almost deafening ; still Charlie was just able to catch the sound of voices outside during the intervals of cessation from knocking on the part of his besiegers. "Blow up," and "pistol," he distinctly heard, and then a hoarse cry from some one, evidently intended for him.

"If you don't open the door we'll blow it up."

"Blow away, my hearties," shouted he in reply, "and take care how you play with gunpowder, for it's dangerous."

A sound very much like a laugh followed this ; and then

the same voice that had addressed him before screamed out,—

"If you'll give in, young 'un, we won't hurt you. It's no use your fighting against odds; we've cobbled your mates, and we shall have to do the same for you if you keep us out here much longer."

To this Charlie vouchsafed no answer, and the battering at the door was resumed. The threat to blow him up was evidently an empty one, as nothing of the sort was attempted; but presently there was a loud report, and a bullet came crashing through the woodwork, passing disagreeably near to the lad's head. Through the opening that had thus been made, five other bullets followed one another in close succession, evidently fired not so much with an intention of hitting as of alarming him. Charlie crept on his hands and knees up to the door, and, when the discharge had ended, quietly raised himself up, and, placing the muzzle of his revolver in the aperture, pulled the trigger. There was a groan, a smothered curse, and a heavy fall, and immediately after the hammering was resumed more savagely than ever. Charlie reloaded the empty chamber of his revolver, and drew himself a little on one side. Just then his eye noticed that the top bolt was giving way. At the same moment the sound as of blows dealt by an axe upon the door made itself audible, and warned him that, with an instrument such as that, his assailants would soon be able to cut their way through to him.

How slowly the hours, or, more properly speaking, minutes, dragged on! The hands of the clock seemed

glued upon its face. The atmosphere of the room was stifling. "God help me," murmured Charlie to himself; "the door won't stand much longer, and then there's no help for it. They'd soon do for me. Oh! if I only had Uncle Seth or Bill Marston with me." Alas! Charlie, you might as well have wanted the whole battalion of Guards at your back; they whom you called were lying out in the storm and rain, sore stricken and motionless!

By this time the wreckers were evidently infuriated at the resistance they had met with, and redoubled their efforts upon the door, which slowly but surely was giving way. The axe was doing its work only too well, and already a huge piece of the wooden framework had fallen in.

The barrier was now nearly broken down that protected him, and in a moment more the enemy would be upon him. In those few seconds that ensued the boy's lips moved rapidly. With the shadow of death almost upon him, he had yet time to remember Him whose omnipotent arm could snatch him from out the jaws of death. Like the Puritan soldier of old, Charlie paused in the conflict to whisper a prayer. Then, resolute and undaunted, he prepared to meet the fate that he felt must inevitably fall upon him.

He had not to wait long: there was a crash, and then a rush of dark forms through the doorway; he had but time to aim his revolver and pull the trigger, then some heavy body fell against him and brought him to the ground. The darkness had saved him, for the wreckers did not wait to look for him, but hurried upward to the light-room to extinguish the lights.

Charlie did not remain long where he was, but aroused himself, and found that there was a human body lying on the top of him. It was with difficulty he managed to push it off, and then he crept stealthily out into the yard. Upstairs, the wreckers were evidently at their work of spoliation,—the sound of crashing glass, mingled with shouts, might be heard amid the rushings of the wind. As he found himself outside, a deep "*boom, boom,*" from the direction of the sea, startled him. It was clear that there was some vessel in difficulties.

Little hope for her now. The Gunnerstone Lights were dead, and in vain might those on board of her look eagerly through the mist and scud for the guiding beacon. Charlie groped his way across the yard, and as he did so stumbled over a prostrate form; he bent down by it, and passed his hand over the face. He knew then that it was his uncle Seth. He knelt by his side and whispered,—

"Are you better, uncle?"

A feeble voice murmured in reply,

"Good lad, good lad!" and then it ceased, as if from exhaustion.

Still "*boom, boom,*" went the guns, each report sounding nearer and nearer than the last. Charlie knew, as certainly as if he had seen it with his eyes, that the labouring ship was driving straight on for the reef.

By this time the wreckers had accomplished their work of destruction, and now they came hurrying out of the lighthouse and made for the landing-stairs, which were situated on the more sheltered side of the rock. Charlie, crouched into a corner of one of the outhouses, was

gnashing his teeth at being unable to communicate its danger to the ill-fated ship.

Suddenly he was startled by a ruddy glare from the direction of the shore, shooting up towards the skies, and in a few seconds a bright flame burnt there steadily. Some one had improvised a beacon on the cliffs above Gunner-stone. Charlie was gazing intently on this welcome apparition, when he heard a loud exclamation of rage. The wreckers found that their boat was gone, and that they were caught in a trap. No lock, or bolt, or bar could hold them in closer imprisonment than did the green waves, rolling ceaselessly round the rock. Retribution had come at last, and not a bit too soon!

It was dangerous work for Charlie to be thus shut up in the midst of his enemies, but I am bound to say that, instead of being in the least put out, he rubbed his hands together with pleasure to think that villainy had thus met its reward. And they, like cravens and cowards as they were, seemed utterly defeated by the blow.

It was a strange beginning for a Christmas Day, thought Charlie, as, cowering under the rocks, worn out and exhausted with the events of the night, he saw the daylight rising out of the sea, and thanked God for his preservation. Likely enough, could the wreckers have seen him, they would have disposed of him, in order to preclude any possibility of his turning up hereafter at some disagreeable moment. But he was hidden from their view, and most of them believed that he was "knocked on the head," as one of their number elegantly expressed it.

But now the dawn had come, and these midnight

marauders and murderers looked one another in the face—some pale, others haggard, but all seemed impressed with the danger of their position. And thus the morning of this Christmas Day broke upon the rock whereon stood Gunnerstone Lighthouse. The storm had gone to rest now, and the glorious sun already made a golden pathway over the waters, slumbering peacefully after their riot and revelry. Its brightness fell on the granite sides of the lighthouse, and glanced back on to a pale face lying still and motionless, as stony in look as the walls themselves, while it lit up a white sail that was disappearing on the horizon. Brave, honest, noble Seth Lawrence knew not that the day was up and that the world was already stirring to celebrate its great festival, its feast of feasts. A messenger had come to him, whose summons none could disobey, and he fled away with him on the wings of the wind, to stand in the presence of the Master who had sent for him.

And the good ship the *Black Dragoon*, with its living freight, bound for the west, passed on its way; but there were many, indeed most of those on board of her, offering up a thanksgiving for their preservation, when the world awoke from its slumbers. On, on, brave vessel, into the open sea, towards the new country: the sacrifice that has gained thee thy safety would not have been grudged by the victim; for, like a true English heart, unselfish to the end, he would have gladly bartered his life to save a fellow-man.

I must now venture to assert my privilege as chronicler, and dispose of certain important events in a somewhat

summary manner. The wreckers were captured immediately, upon the scene of their crime, by the revenue cutter, which had come round on the information given by Bill Marston, who had launched the lighthouse boat, and with great difficulty made his way in it to the shore, when he was supposed to be lying safe and quiet with a bullet through his head. He had first taken the precaution to cut the painter with which the wreckers had secured the big galley that had brought them, and thus shut off from them the only means of escape. His first care on landing had been to make his way to a farmhouse on the cliffs, where he obtained the assistance that enabled him to light the beacon that warned the *Black Dragoon* of her danger just in time. It was all due to his indomitable pluck and energy that the machinations of these banditti of the sea had been defeated, and the emigrant ship saved from destruction.

It was some time before Charlie recovered from the very severe struggle to which he had been subjected, but youth and a strong constitution gained the victory, and he was well enough to appear at the assizes, where the "Great Wrecking Case at Gunnerstone" excited an immense amount of attention. He gave his evidence with much modesty, and in a way that called forth the hearty commendation of the learned judge who presided. The two ringleaders of the wreckers perished on the scaffold, and the rest were sent to expiate their crime by various terms of penal servitude, and thus Seth Lawrence's death was avenged.

The owners of the *Black Dragoon* presented Bill Mar-

ston with a gold watch and one hundred pounds, while Charlie was rewarded with a silver one and thirty pounds, whereat the two recipients were highly delighted.

A turn of the pen, and behold another Christmas Eve has come round. Bill and Charlie are sitting in the room in the lighthouse, but a stranger is in their company, a jovial, genial fellow, but not Seth Lawrence. There was a big salt tear rolling down Bill Marston's cheek, forced out by the tide of recollection that was flooding on him.

"Aye, lad," he murmured, in a strangely choky tone, "he was made of the right stuff, he was. Let's hope to do our duty as he did."

And the lad's sobbing voice said "*Amen.*"





LENA'S CHRISTMAS-BOX.

LHE Christmas holidays! What a train of remembrance the mere mention of these two words awakens! It is as if I were flashed back on the wings of the lightning to a season that is past never to come again. Shadows float in mid-air—faces drift like drops of rain past my eyes—there is an indistinct murmur of voices, and then, as when the light of the magic-lantern is quenched, darkness falls upon the canvas, and I awake to the reality of to-day. As the drowning sailor, with the remorseless waters gurgling around his doomed head, thinks of the white cliffs of the dear old country that he will see no more, so men and women in the rough battle of maturer years are fain at times to retrace the road they have travelled. Thus, as Christmastide creeps on with its memories and associations, there rises before me the vision of a little girl, who was brave, honest, and faithful, who learnt a bitter lesson of patience with a courage that never swerved and a purpose that never faltered.

Miss Marston's select establishment for young ladies,

situated at Prospect House, Brighton, was very generally and favourably known. The principal herself was singularly prepossessing in manner, and, though well advanced in years, possessed the happy faculty of being able to create friendships and sympathies between herself and her pupils, whose numbers were limited. In fact, the full complement was restricted to twelve, for the first principle of Miss Marston's educational system was as far as possible to assimilate school to home. She may have been a weak, silly old lady, with a larger amount of heart than world-wisdom, but taken all in all, she was one of those good Christians whose account, when it has been cast up, will bear public inspection. Her chief and only fault was the implicit confidence she placed in all that was said or told her by her niece, Esther Barnett, whom, being the daughter of a penniless sister of hers, she had for charity's sake taken into her home and treated as her own child. Esther had fully partaken of all the advantages which the teachers and professors at Prospect House could afford, and it was in no way astonishing that when she came to woman's estate her aunt should call upon her to make some return by assisting in the administration of the school. Gratitude was a quality almost, if not entirely, unknown to Esther. So long as she had a smart bonnet, cloak, and dress to appear in at church on Sundays, she did not think it necessary to give herself a few moments' trouble to remember the hand that bestowed them, but accepted all her good fortune as a matter of course. It was not surprising that, when the time came for her to make herself useful, she shrank from work like a lazy horse

from the collar, and though necessity compelled her to submit to being harnessed, her slight duties were irksome and unbearable. Yet the burden she had to carry was a trifling one!

Kathleen Paget, whose story I am telling, was familiarly known among her schoolfellows by the nickname of Lena. She was a very great favourite with Miss Marston, but none of them were jealous of her; for though she was a strange, silent little body, who loved to be alone, there was something about her that irresistibly attracted sympathy and affection. Perhaps it was because Madame Nature in some savage freak had dwarfed her growth, and as the rough wind bows the sapling downwards, had played cruel havoc with her figure. Yet she was no cripple—only bent, not broken: she could be as active as any of her companions, and not one of them more than she delighted in those occasional rambling scampers over the glorious downs. She never seemed to weary of those wide-spreading mountains of green, over which the fresh breeze straight from the bosom of the great sea swept in joyous liberty. She revelled in its boisterous rudeness, and loved to feel it playing its merry antics among her auburn tresses. Sometimes she would stay behind unobserved, and with her hat in her hand meet it with bright eyes and cheery face; then as her sight stretched away out to the wide expanse of green waters, and she beheld God's great highway that leads to all the ends of the world, she would murmur, "Darling mamma, do come to me, I am so lonely." But nor voice nor sound answered her; no brave ship speeding up channel, its full-spread sails smiling in

the sun, bore homewards the mother she so longed for. Her dead father's place had been supplied, and pretty little Mrs. Paget had new ties to bind her to India. And this was another reason why Lena was loved, and I may add pitied, in the small circle of Prospect House. Still she asked for no sympathy. A stranger in a strange land, school was home to her, and though when the holiday-times came round many of the other girls asked her to go and stay with them, she always refused, preferring to remain with Miss Marston. And these two had more than once made pleasant trips away together, to the undisguised mortification of Esther, whose mother always wished to have her at home with her during the vacations. Moreover, she knew that her aunt was by no means a poor woman; eighteen years at Prospect House and the strictest economy in her personal expenditure had enabled Miss Marston to lay by a very comfortable little sum against the rainy day. At the time of which I am writing she entertained very serious notions of retiring, and as the Christmas holidays approached she began to think whether the close of the year would not be the best season at which to say good-bye to a business life. Occasionally, too, she had unpleasant reminders that she was anything but a young woman, in the shape of divers aches and pains, and already, for some time, she had had to give up presiding at early morning school. I do not want to be hard upon Esther, but I fear she did more than once allow herself to think of the ulterior destination of her aunt's money, when the good soul had gone to her rest. Be that as it may, she viewed with considerable disfavour the

affection that existed between Lena and Miss Marston, and though she made little or no effort to ingratiate herself with the one, she took every opportunity to make herself disagreeable to the other. Lena often sighed to herself when she had been scolded by Esther without having given her the slightest cause of offence ; but she kept her troubles to herself, and carried them with her up to her own little room at the top of the house that looked upon the sea. Here at the open window she would sit by the hour together, gazing dreamily at the waves, and talking softly to herself. And often the burden of her self-converse was sad, for the long eyelashes would become heavy with moisture, and the dark, thoughtful eyes be blinded with tears. And yet and again ever the same yearning cry, "Darling mamma, come to me, I am so lonely!" Oh, that those entreating words could have been borne over sea and mountain, river and desert, on the bosom of the wind, to her to whom they were addressed ! Even she must have been melted by them!

The examinations which took place every half-year at Prospect House had been brought to a highly satisfactory termination, and in distributing the prizes, of which by the way she was no niggard, Miss Marston concluded by announcing her intention of retiring. "I am getting an old woman," she said, "and am work-weary. After to-day we shall meet no more as mistress and pupils; but I pray God that each of you may feel that, as long as I am spared, you have a devoted friend." Her voice broke, and she could say no more, and then all discipline was at an end. They pressed round her, and if tears and kisses and hugs

are a reward for a life usefully spent, Maria Marston had not laboured in vain.

By-and-bye there was much rushing up and down stairs, cording and fastening of boxes—promises by all the young ladies to write letters to one another regularly once a week—and all the bustle and confusion consequent on breaking-up day. And when the night came, the little world of Prospect House was dissolved, and Queen Marston the first and last, had descended from her throne, and laid aside the robe of sovereignty that she had worn so long, for ever! And still up at the open window, watching the moon glittering on the frosty sea, was Lena, murmuring as ever, “Darling mamma, come to me, I am so lonely!”

It had been arranged that Esther should stay on at Prospect House till after Christmas Day, by which time Miss Marston would have definitely settled as to her own ultimate movements. Esther was highly delighted at remaining in so lively a place as Brighton, more especially as she was invited to a dance that was to come off on Christmas Eve, at the house of a Mrs. James, in Prospect Terrace; and her whole mind was concentrated on the preparation of an extensive dress, which she contemplated would excite very general admiration. There was one matter that gave her very great anxiety, namely, that with the exception of a pair of ear-rings and a gold watch-chain, she possessed neither jewelry nor ornament. Her aunt, she knew, had no end of pretty gewgaws and sparkling trinkets locked up in her dressing-case; but Miss Marston held these in special veneration, for they had belonged to

her mother, and from some unaccountable feeling she did not like them to be worn. Esther was in despair: a low dress without an ornament for her neck, and bare arms unrelieved by a single bracelet! The mere thought made her shudder. She must appeal to her aunt's sympathies, that was quite certain.

The day for the celebration of Mrs. James's party arrived in due course. Miss Marston had not been feeling well for several days, and it had been settled that Esther should go under the *chaperonage* of the lady who lived next door, who was also invited. She had not yet asked her aunt to lend her some of her ornaments, but she meant to do so before going up to dress. The afternoon was well advanced, and she was sitting in the dining-room putting the finishing touches to her wonderful dress, when she was startled by the sudden entrance of Lena, whose pale face and anxious look betokened that something was wrong.

"Gracious me, child!" she exclaimed, "what on earth is the matter?"

"I am afraid," replied Lena, "that Miss Marston is very ill. Indeed, I think she ought to see Dr. Barton at once. She is shaking and shivering so terribly, and keeps saying that her head aches dreadfully."

"Oh, nonsense," answered Esther, plying her needle more busily than before. "Doctor, indeed! I wonder what next you will advise? She's only got a bad cold, and that has been coming on for several days. It really is a pity you must always be interfering in what does not concern you."

She looked up from her work for a moment to see what effect her words would have: Lena was gone, and was already half on her way to Dr. Barton, who presently came back with her, and together they crept quietly up to the sick-room; for Lena was right. Maria Marston lay grievously ill, and when the man of medicine saw her he looked very grave, and said he would go to his home and make her up a soothing draught at once. Meanwhile he left her in Lena's charge, and she, sinking into the big arm-chair at the bedside, watched the kind face that even now was so altered, and prayed for her she loved, who had been so good to her, as only a child can pray.

There were heavy curtains round the bed, which were drawn closely at either side, but remained open at the foot, in front of which stood the dressing-table with the looking-glass, and among other things, Miss Marston's dressing-case upon it.

Lena had not sat very long, when, turning her eyes in that direction, she saw Esther, resplendent in all the glories of her new ball-dress, peeping cautiously in at her aunt, who lay in a half-dozing state. There was no candle in the room, but the bright light of the fire, while it made Esther visible, did not disclose Lena's post of occupation. For a moment she thought of discovering herself to Esther and telling her how ill her aunt was; but then she knew that she would only meet with harsh and disagreeable words, and so she held her peace, and cuddled herself up more cosily into her arm-chair.

"What a nuisance!" Esther murmured audibly. "She's asleep, and I don't like to wake her to ask her to lend me

the things. I wonder if she would mind very much if I were to take them? It would only be for the evening, and then I might be able to put them back without her knowing anything about it."

Then Lena heard the rustling of a silk dress, and presently the rattle of keys, and then Esther's voice once more.

"How very lucky, here are aunt's keys!" Another pause, and then, as if she had picked up courage and overcome her scruples, "I don't see why I shouldn't. I'm sure there can't be any harm." And then she talked openly to herself, while indignant conscience did fierce battle against her within.

The fire seemed to burn more brightly than ever, and to throw all its light upon Esther. A moment more and she had opened the dressing-case and borrowed the much-coveted ornaments—a turquoise locket with appropriate chain—for her neck, and a pair of bracelets, which she at once fastened on either arm. Then carefully closing and locking the case, she proceeded to take a survey of herself in the glass. Poor vain, giddy girl, what are those shining pieces of gold, these glittering stones, to the love you have lost? Not all the wealth of Golconda will compensate you for a cold and selfish heart.

Maria Marston had seen and heard all. At the first sound of Esther's voice she tried to rouse herself, but her strength failed her. Yet her eyes were keen as ever, and her ears acutely sensitive. Speechless as one in a nightmare, she watched the drama that was thus played before her in the firelight's glow. And it left its mark!

scored deep into her heart, where the wound it had made would throb till her pulses ceased to beat. No complaint, no angry word ; she only closed her eyes, and passing her hand wearily over her forehead, whispered mournfully to herself, "So soon !" It was hard that this girl, whom she had petted, ay, treated in every way as her own daughter, should behave thus ; and, ill though she was, she could not restrain a feeling of indignation. And then the colour flushed her thin cheeks as she thought of a patient, gentle little girl, whose love and tenderness had been all-in-all to her. And as she remembered the tiny thoughtful face, and the dark kindly eyes, she murmured "Lena," and in another moment a soft cheek was nestled on the pillow beside hers, and a voice whispered, "Oh, ma'am, I do so hope you are better !" Who can wonder that Maria Marston flung her arms round this being, who had been more than child to her, and pressed her hysterically to her breast ? Two lonely hearts beat in unison at last. Well that it had been sooner ! And thus Christmas Eve deepened into night and hastened on to the tomorrow of peace and goodwill toward men.

Dr. Barton was in and out all the evening. He had a very high regard for Miss Marston, and he felt that she was in a very precarious state. She was perfectly conscious, but was growing weaker hourly, and more than once he had suggested that Esther should be sent for. But the mere mention of her niece's name roused her, and each time she shook her head and said, "No, let her enjoy her dancing. As she has made her bed, so must she lie upon it." Lena she would not allow to leave her

for a moment, save for a few minutes, during which she was engaged in earnest talk with Dr. Barton. And as she was called back, and came to the bedside, Lena saw one of the servants, who was putting up some writing things, fold up a paper and hand it to her mistress, who then put it under her pillow. From that time Maria Marston grew more and more feeble. The kind old doctor knew in his heart that his efforts were vain. The wind that was already playing with the flame would ere long quench its light for ever. Clasping Lena's hands within her own, as in a vice, the doomed woman awaited the Master's coming. Her face was placid and serene; she was perfectly reconciled to the fate that was so fast approaching; and as the clock on the mantelpiece struck one, she murmured, "I wonder if I shall live to hear its sound again?"

Never, Maria Marston, in this world! If the flight of time is marked in the courts of the Eternal, there, and there only, will you awaken to its progress. Ere the minute-hand has travelled its sixty stages again, your journey will have been accomplished, and the last resting-place on the way reached!

I have no desire to chronicle the revulsion of feeling, the dismay, the horror that moved Esther when on her return from her evening's amusement she found that her aunt, who had been so ever-thoughtful and loving to her, was no more.

"Why did you not send for me?" she almost screamed, in the agony of her self-reproach.

"Because," answered one of the servants, less feeling

than the rest, "mistress said that if we did she would **not** see you."

And at that moment Esther's eyes fell upon the glittering bracelets on her arm, and then she knew the reason why. Burying her face in her hands, she sank overpowered with her feelings into an arm-chair, and sobbed like a child. Perhaps Heaven, in its infinite mercy, would instil other and better thoughts into her mind henceforth. Perchance from this time the tide would turn, and lead her to become a true woman.

It was a sad Christmas Day for all at Prospect House. The servants had lost a kind and indulgent mistress, while Lena felt herself without a friend, whose place she could never supply. The blow was a terrible one, and made her very sad, though her grief was undemonstrative, and she kept her sorrows to herself. Up in her own little room at the top of the house she took refuge, and in its solitude found relief and sympathy. And then she made her way to her old post at the window, and looked eagerly out, after her wont, at the dear sea she loved so, and it seemed to her as if the spirit of her dead friend were slowly vanishing on the verge of the waste of waters. Would that she had the wings of a bird, and could fly after her into the black night that draped the heavens as if with funeral hangings!

Thus dreamily wandering in vacancy, Lena remained at the window, when she was startled by feeling a hand placed upon her arm. Turning round, she could just distinguish that it was Esther, who was standing beside her. No longer the same cold, selfish, defiant Esther, but

a sad and humbled girl, her head bowed in deep abasement, and her utterance choked with sobs. It is the fate of some to learn their lessons of experience in many light warnings and trifling punishments; Esther had been taught hers in one sad night of bitter woe.

"Love me, Lena," she sobbed out, throwing herself down on her knees beside the child, and resting her head against the little girl's bosom, "or I shall die."

And Lena put her arms lovingly round the repentant one's neck, and kissed her, and then smoothed back her hair off her burning forehead. It was as if an angel's hand were soothing her, so Esther thought, and nearer and nearer she pressed herself to the heart of the gentle, tender being. Where better can I leave Esther than on the threshold of a new life, hand-in-hand with Lena?

And what was Lena's Christmas-box, after all? Miss Marston had made her mistress of every sixpence of money she had in the world, while her niece, Esther, was not mentioned. Her first, last, and only will and testament was written by herself on the piece of paper she had put under her pillow, and in the steadiness of its penmanship showed but a reflex of the stern determination of her mind. It may be said she was **too severe**, yet what she had written could not be altered.

It was not till several days after Miss Marston's death that Lena knew of the fortune that had fallen to her lot. Young though she was, she perfectly understood the situation in which it placed her, and at first she said she would have nothing to do with it—that it belonged of right to Esther, and that she must have it. But Dr.

Barton, who was appointed executor to Miss Marston's will, told her that this could not be—that the money was left to her, and that she would have the entire control of it one day. However, at last all difficulties were overcome by Esther promising to live with Lena and take care of her, with which arrangement both parties were equally delighted. In a small cottage on the Devonshire coast these two took up their abode, and often as of old Lena looks out upon the sea and murmurs, "Darling mamma, come to me!" But she does not still add, "I am so lonesome," for she and Esther are very happy, and love to be in one another's society

THE END.